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THE FUTURE OF METHODISM AS AN INSTRUMENT
OF SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Faculty of the
School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
Jean Jacques Rousseau
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*has been presented to and accepted by the Faculty
of the School of Theology at Claremont in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of*

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

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PREFACE

The Church was made by lay men and women, under the impulsion of a few leaders. This is true for the early church, early Methodism, and many other denominations. There is only a difference in degree between professional ministers and the laity, not a difference in nature. All Christians are (or should be) ministers, a "holy people," a "nation of priests," and this is what is explicitly stated in the Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church: "Ministry in the Christian Church is . . . a ministry bestowed upon and required of the entire Church. All Christians are called to ministry, and theirs is a ministry of the people of God within the community of faith and in the world." (1972 Discipline, par. 301.)

But most of us, Methodists, have forgotten this truth and this requirement. We tend to leave on the professional full-time ministers the whole responsibility for the accomplishment of the work of God in the world. We do not realize that out of the sixty to eighty hours most ministers give every week to the service of their parishes only a few can be devoted to evangelism and to the expansion of the Kingdom of God on earth. Without the active and earnest participation of the laity the Word cannot be made flesh and cannot conquer the world.

This is one of the main reasons for the decline of the United Methodist Church, as well as for many other churches. This is why I came to the ministry, I mean to the full-time ministry. My purpose, in going to the seminary and in becoming a clergyman was to acquire

the necessary qualifications to educate the laity, to mobilize them, and, hopefully, to help them do their share of the work. Basically I remain a layman. Ministers, after all are recruited among laymen, they are not Levites or Saducees. As a layman I was not satisfied with the "discussion groups" or "study groups" which were not "action groups." Christianity must be lived and exemplified in the world, or it is not Christianity at all.

The ideas I develop in this dissertation came to me several years ago, before I went to the seminary. But they were clarified, they were enriched, and they took their final shape in the School of Theology at Claremont. When I look back at the number of persons who directly or indirectly contributed to the production of this dissertation I am astonished and grateful. It is not my work really, it is a collective work.

I am grateful to the people of First Methodist Church (not "United" yet), Las Vegas, and Bob Brashares their minister at that time, who warmly welcomed us, my wife and me, in the early months of 1964, when we were "strangers," and made us feel at home. Thanks to them we became Methodists, we found a Church we could love and serve, a church liberal enough and ecumenical enough to offer us four creeds to choose from. I am grateful to the people of University United Methodist Church, Las Vegas (many of them old friends coming from First Methodist), and Jerry Blankinship, their minister, who nurtured us in their fellowship. It was the congregation in which the decision to give all our time to the church came to maturity.

I am grateful to Douglas Harrell, Jerry Blankinship and Bob Weirbach who helped us take the final step. It was not painful; but it was frightening, and they were there to encourage us and reassure us. I am grateful to the pastors under whom I discovered the full meaning and the great enriching value of the ministry: as a student with Fred Coots, as an intern with Gary Van Boening, as an assistant minister with Fred Trevino.

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I am grateful to Dick Denton who checked the form of the dissertation and helped me set the bibliography and the footnotes in order. I am grateful to Barbara Henckel who did the final typing, a perfect work. Above all, I thank God for having chosen me as his servant and for having sustained me with his Spirit.

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INTRODUCTION

Methodists today could be very much concerned by the decline of their church in the United States of America, especially if they think of the great tradition of Methodism, of its past success and tremendous growth comparable only to the growth of the early Christian Church. John Wesley was an apostle at least as active and devoted as Paul. In sixty years of his life he revitalized the faith of the British to the point that he changed for the better the face of England, and in America he launched what was to be, for a time, the greatest and biggest church of the United States of America.

At the time of his death, in March 1791, there were around 75,000 Methodists in England. In the United States of America, by the end of the War of Independence there were almost 14,000 registered members,¹ and in 1844, the Methodist Episcopal Church, in spite of the Methodist Protestant Schism, had 1,056,000 people, far more than all other churches in the country, all together.² Methodism at that time was the American religion *par excellence*.

Then Methodism lost its supremacy and was superseded by the Roman Catholic Church and the Baptists. It has been steadily declining since 1944 when the ratio METHODISTS/TOTAL POPULATION (M/TP)

¹*The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, 187.

²*Ibid.*, II, 238.

reached a new peak of 6.09%. This continuous decline was veiled for a time by an apparent increase and an absolute all time peak of 11,000,000 members in 1968. But the trend went on, and at the close of 1972 the total membership of the United Methodist Church was about 10,300,000 for a M/PT ratio of a little less than 5%, which is an 18% decline in relative numerical importance.³ In the Southwest, in the territory within the bounds of the Southern California-Arizona-Nevada Conference, the relative decline is still more important due to the fact that the rate of population growth is one of the highest in the country.⁴

All this is very alarming, the more so since Church School attendance is declining too. With fewer and fewer youth instructed in the Christian faith and in the Methodist tradition--and sometimes very poorly at this as we will see, the process can only accelerate. Yet too many, especially among the most influential in the denomination, do not believe in the danger of the situation: "This is a general phenomenon, a cyclical trend which will reverse," or "let the chaff be separated from the wheat, with fewer but better members we will do a better job" is a kind of argument often heard, but which derive from a blind optimism. I think they are just excuses for not acting when

³The percentages shown in this paragraph are computed from figures taken from the Statistical Abstract of the United States, the Minutes of the Annual Conferences, and the General Minutes. See below, Chapter 2.

⁴See below, Chapter 2.

it is high time to act. A trend which has spread over thirty years cannot be ignored, and to neglect so many insistent alarm signals denotes a self-destructive psychology. Why does our Church regress when others are expanding? We close churches when the Mormons build new temples. We reduce the number of our missionaries abroad to a point where we have now only 60% of what the Mormons have--and yet they count only 3,300,000 members in the motherland.

The purpose of this dissertation is to point out the reasons for such a decline, and to suggest remedies. These remedies will be sought in the tradition of Methodism and of the Christian Faith by sorting out some of the factors which seem to be permanently associated with success and growth. These factors, then, will be brought into parallel with successful modern attempts of church action and expansion in order to see how they can be adapted to the conditions of our times.

However, due to the limitation in size of a Doctor of Ministry dissertation, the whole spectrum of causes and remedies will not be explored in depth. I will mention the most important of both but I will concentrate only on the one aspect which is, in my view, most determinant and relevant to our times. Almost everyone will agree that the main factors of success of early Methodism (besides the unshakable faith and absolute commitment of its founders of course) were its characteristics as:

- a revolutionary and social movement,
- an evangelical and missionary movement,
- an ecumenical and theologically liberal movement.

Of these three aspects I will consider the first one as the main sector of exploration for this dissertation, because I sincerely believe it is the most determinant and the most relevant to our times. Of necessity there will be some overlapping with the two other aspects.

After having examined the growth and decline of Methodism I will endeavor to show that the main factor of its success, in addition to the absolute faith and commitment of the leaders, was its implementation of social Christianity. Then I will attempt to demonstrate how social Christianity is deeply rooted in the New Testament and finds its full justification in Scriptures. Finally I will try to convince the reader that one of the best ways to revitalize Methodism is to return to its true vocation as social Christianity, and I will propose a formula to mobilize its latent energies according to the best of its tradition.

PART I

METHODISM, PAST AND PRESENT

CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL HERITAGE OF THE METHODISTS

Today we do not like to "waste time on history." Yet is not our God, Yahweh, the God of history? By ignoring the precious teachings of history and especially of our rich Methodist tradition we have to learn again by direct experience--that is a succession of mistakes and failures--what was already well established. Instead of starting from a superior level to reach a higher one which will be a firm stepping-stone for the coming generation we fall back to the foot of the cliff and have to climb again all the way up, and cannot reach the top. By so doing we forsake our duty as a useful link in the progression of mankind in its spiritual evolution.

Consequently I will spend some time to examine three characteristics of Methodism which were closely related to its tremendous growth and success: Methodism was a revolutionary and social movement, an evangelical and missionary movement, an ecumenical and theologically liberal movement.

A. METHODISM AS A REVOLUTIONARY AND SOCIAL MOVEMENT

The 1972 Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church gives in its historical statement¹ "three notable activities" in which

¹*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1972* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), pp. 8, 9.

John Wesley excelled. One is Evangelism: "His preachers went to the people; they did not wait for the people to come to them." What kind of people? Why did they join Methodism *en masse*? An insight is given by the same historical statement: John Wesley

simply followed, like Paul, the clear call of God, first to preach the Gospel to the needy who were not reached by the Established Church and its clergy, second to take care of those who were won to the Christian life . . . He found men who were ready to carry the Gospel to the masses, speaking on the streets, in the open fields, and in private homes.²

"The needy" . . . Who were they?

"Take care" . . . How?

"He found men" . . . What men?

I will attempt to answer these questions in the following development.

John Wesley was asked "to preach no more" in the Anglican churches; but his calling was so strong that he preached anyway, literally making the world his parish. He resolutely turned his back to the rich and went to the poor because the former would not listen to his message, and the latter needed it most.

Wesley knew that he could do more with the humbler than with the higher classes. The higher classes . . . would not have listened to Wesley and would not have needed him if they had listened. So he went elsewhere. . . . He was himself a High Churchman and Tory, by his own avowal, but he certainly spoke his whole mind on High Churchmen and Tories.³

In June 1739 he came to Bath where he confronted the idle gentry and the snobs led by Beau Nash. After his sermon several fine

²*Ibid.*, p. 8.

³Francis J. McConnell, *John Wesley* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 240.

ladies followed him to the place where he was to stay and requested a conversation with him. He told them rather harshly:

I do not expect that the rich and great should want either to speak with me or to hear me, for I speak the plain truth--a thing you hear little of, and do not desire to hear.⁴

To make such a deliberate choice required some courage. It was a time of extreme poverty, of total lack of morality and religion, and of cruel exploitation of man (including women and children as young as four) by man. Gin was the great destroyer of life among the poor.

'Nine tenth of the men in England' said John Wesley 'have no more religion than horses, and perish through total contempt of it.' Early in 1736 Bishop Berkeley . . . remarked 'The age of monsters is not far off.' Morality and religion had collapsed 'to a degree that was never known in any Christian country.'⁵

We must not forget that he was a Tory and a High Churchman, always clean and neat if simply clothed. Nevertheless, in spite of his first instinctive and great repulsion, he followed George Whitefield's suggestion and went to Kingswood, a small mining town near Bristol, to preach in the open air for the miners. They were far from being a gentle congregation. Agnes de la Gorce depicts them as "black devils who used to stop coaches on the highways, who robbed travelers and hid the stolen goods in taverns the police would not

⁴John Wesley, *Journal*, I, 198-199, quoted by Oscar Sherwin, *John Wesley Friend of the People* (New York: Twayne, 1961), p. 48.

⁵Sherwin, *ibid.*, p. 11.

dare to search."⁶ In 1734 and 1738 they went into open rebellion, burning their tools, breaking waterlocks, filling up coal pits with rocks. In 1738 they joined forces with the weavers in Bristol and the army was called in to bring the situation under control.

This is the kind of people to whom John Wesley dedicated his life. He opened his field preaching career at Bristol, on April 2, 1739, the year following the great rebellion, and he announced his mission with the same quotation Jesus used at Nazareth, according to Luke (Luke 4:18-19). Bristol was probably one of the darkest cities in England. It was the capital of the slave trade, where the wealth of ship captains and sea-traders was as an insult to the most destitute people, drunken brutes, robbers, so dehumanized by extreme poverty that they would not hesitate to drag to the market place their wives led like cattle by a rope around their necks shouting "who wants my wife . . . my wife for fifteen shillings?"⁷

Yet these "savages of England" responded to John Wesley and followed him. In Kingswood and Bristol he made hundreds of converts. They were such wretched converts that, when they first came in procession, in August 1739, to receive the holy communion in the Cathedral of Bristol the clergy closed the doors and bishop Butler summoned John Wesley and disapproved of his preaching.⁸

⁶ Agnes De la Gorce, *Wesley Maitre d'un Peuple* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1940), p. 112.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

It was just a beginning. John Wesley had overcome his first repulsion, he had found his way, his true place in the ministry, the fullest use of his time and talents. After Kingswood George Whitefield led him to the suburbs of London, to the Gypsies' camps of Blackheath a refuge of scoundrels, rascals, robbers, false crippled, professional beggars, prostitutes and pimps. There too, he made converts and saved souls. Their meeting place was "The Green Man," a tavern.

With determination he went to the oppressed multitude exploited by employers and corn distillers with the support of the courts. Employers beating up children to death were discharged by the judges; but starving unemployed workers were sentenced to death for a theft of a few shillings. He ministered to the most helpless, destitute, wretched and despised people of his time: the metal workers of Baptist Mills (a copper foundry), and of Hannon Mount (a zinc mill), the fish-mongers of Billingsgate; the ship riggers of Wapping where drunken women used to fight in the mud for the entertainment of the populace. He went to the idle crowds of Kennington Common, in the shadow of the gallows, preaching to sailors, soldiers, porters, dock-laborers. He went to the wrestlers, charlatans and bear-leaders of the popular fairground of Moorefields. He went to Sandhill, the mobsters' den of Newcastle, a city known as a permanent place of unrest and riots, of plundering and looting, a city famous for the drunkenness and the obscene language of its people. He went to the lead, copper and tin miners of Cornwall whose second job was ship-wrecking. He went to the prisons and sent Silas Told to evangelize the prisoners, especially

those sentenced to death. John Wesley and his brother Charles even appointed themselves volunteer chaplains of Newgate, the putrid and contaminated prison of London, where there was a permanent epidemic of the so-called "prison fever." Compared to these the workers of Birmingham, Sheffield, Portland and Portsmouth were innocent lambs.

Among the wretched and the most humble he found his first and most dedicated followers and preachers. I have already mentioned George Whitefield, the son of an innkeeper and Silas Told, a former sailor almost tortured to death on a merchant ship. Other faithful disciples were John Nelson, a stone-mason, and Taylor, an apprentice clothier. We find also an upholsterer, a carpenter, a barber, a haberdasher; two representatives of the bourgeoisie, a surgeon and a distiller, were notable exceptions.

One of the best symbols of John Wesley's ministry was the first Methodist building--the burnt foundry of Moorefields, where the first worship service was held on November 11, 1739, and where he gathered a congregation of poor.

For thirty-eight years the Foundry was the head-quarters of Methodism, and the center of many philanthropic agencies, including the charity school, a dispensary, almhouse for nine poor widows, and a loan society . . . The building (where could seat fifteen hundred people) was often so overcrowded that preacher and people left it for the open fields.⁹

Many hymns written by Charles show very clearly where the hearts of the two brothers were. Who, today, would dare to sing in

⁹ *John Wesley the Methodist* (New York: Eaton and Mains, 1903), pp. 115-116.

a worship service "On the Conversion of a Common Harlot,"¹⁰ "The Cry of a Reprobate,"¹¹ "Oh, How can a Criminal Feast?"¹² or the very explicit hymn of gratitude composed by Charles after his religious experience in the house of a Moravian Brother on the Pentecost Day of 1738?

1. Where shall my wondering soul begin?

5. Outcasts of men to you I call:
 Harlots and publicans and thieves;
 He spreads his arms to embrace you all;
 Sinners alone his grace receive.
 No need of him the righteous have;
 He came the lost to seek and save.
6. Come, all ye Madgalens in lust,
 Ye ruffians fell in murders old;
 Repent, and live: despair and trust
 Jesus for you to death was sold;
 Though hell protest, and earth repine,
 He died for crimes like yours--and mine.
7. Come, O my guilty brethren, come
 Groaning beneath your load of sin
 His bleeding heart shall make you room,
 His open side shall take you in.
 He calls you now, invites you home:
 Come, O my guilty brethren, come.¹³

Like Saint Vincent de Paul before him, and Albert Schweitzer after him, John Wesley understood the Christian ministry as a service

¹⁰ John and Charles Wesley, *The Poetical Works* (London: Wesleyan-Methodist Conference Office, 1868), I, 93.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, III, 24.

¹² *Ibid.*, IV, 363.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I, 93, and for some stanzas see *The Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: Methodist Publishing House, 1966), Hymn 528.

to the poor and the reviled, according to Jesus' message.

In contrast, who were against him? Of course the clergy of the established church, local parsons who organized mobs against his meetings, bishops as the bishop of Bristol, and, as late as 1784 the bishop of London who refused to ordain some of his preachers he wanted to send to the United States of America; the idle snobs like Beau Nash and his followers, the countryside gentry on whom the local clergy depended for a living; the oppressors and exploiters of the people: employers, corn distillers, tavern keepers, organizers and adepts of cock fighting and bull baiting; the University--in 1744 he preached at Oxford for the last time and in 1768 six students accused of Methodism were expelled from the same University. "The cow belongs to the meadow, you must drive her away if she comes into the garden" said Dr. Samuel Johnson, the rector, to justify his decision.¹⁴ There were no limits to brutality and calumny against the Methodists. They were even accused of being supporters of Charles Edward, and on these grounds, John Wesley was almost killed at Falmouth. They were systematic targets of the Press Gang and sent by force to serve in the Navy and the Army. A few members of the upper class, however, supported Methodism. Among the most famous were David Hume, Lord Bolingbroke, Lord Chesterfield, Lord Chatham, and above all Lady Huntington. She especially helped George Whitefield who advocated a moral reform of the nobility. She organized private gatherings of

¹⁴De la Gorce, p. 208.

aristocrats to listen to him and she collected money for his orphanage in Georgia. She also paid for John Nelson's ransom when he was captured by the Press Gang. But these were rare exceptions, and, at any rate, they never became members of the Methodist societies.

Now we may try to analyze why Methodism was so successful among the lower class and the outcast. The most influential factor was certainly John Wesley's total commitment to the cause of the poor, his love and care for them, the absolute sacrifice of his own financial resources to the needy--in all his life he never spent more than 30 pounds a year (about \$2,400 of our time) for himself. To preach by way of example is certainly the most effective way to reach people's hearts. Many of his disciples showed the same total dedication and accepted suffering and martyrdom like William Seward, stoned to death in Wales, and Thomas Beard who died in jail, victim of the Press.

Methodism gave the poor the sense of their dignity, the conviction of their worth in the sight of God; it restored their self-esteem and self-confidence. They discovered their humanity. In this tremendous task of rehumanization John Wesley, however, was not a demagogue (although some would say he was an autocrat).

Wesley met the masses to whom he spoke on the level. He certainly did not look down upon them with any trace of superiority. He never threatened, he never cajoled, he never flattered. He could make them thoroughly ashamed of themselves and yet not leave them in any groveling self-contempt.¹⁵

Thanks to his gigantic efforts in the field of educational

¹⁵McConnell, p. 236.

writing they became knowledgeable. In the class meetings they learned to help each other, to be disciplined, to manage the funds collected for those who were still poorer than they. They learned the rules of true democracy and leadership.

John Wesley taught liberty, equality and fraternity long before the French Revolution. Methodism was a religion of the common people, a movement of and by the poor . . . Methodism was republican in government . . . Working men and women were made into class leaders, local preachers, exhorters, prayer leaders, trustees, and stewards. They would exercise their votes . . . All this opportunity and trust were offered to the poorest of the poor who were made most welcome.¹⁶

The beneficial influence of Methodism on the masses was best seen when, less than a quarter of a century after its beginning, employers and officers discovered and acknowledged that Methodists were the most reliable workers and soldiers. John Wesley's followers frequently became the leaders of the new trade-unions, and of the Chartist Movement. They had learned solidarity and the respect of the poor.

No one could be a good Methodist without engaging in social activities. The rules demanded it. The existence of social distress was held to impose a special obligation upon Methodists . . . No note of condescension was tolerated. 'Give none that asks relief either an ill word or an ill look. Do not hurt them' . . .¹⁷

When Wesley relieved poor people in the street he always removed his hat when they thanked him. . . . Members manifested an aggressive interest in distress about them, and their love and beneficence were not confined to Methodists alone.¹⁸

¹⁶Sherwin, p. 35.

¹⁷Wesley, *Journal*, II, 21, quoted by Sherwin, p. 102.

¹⁸Sherwin, p. 102.

Finally, through solidarity, hard work, thrift, moral and religious discipline, Methodists reached the level of the middle class. Methodism changed the face and the social conditions of England.

The same kind of observations can be made about early American Methodism. Philip Embury, the first Methodist preacher in the American colonies, was a carpenter by trade and the descendant of a Protestant family who migrated to Ireland after the invasion of Palatinate by Louis XIV. He preached one of his first sermons in the almhouse of New York where the superintendent and several inmates were converted. The first Methodist meeting-place was a rented rigging-loft. In Baltimore the first Sunday School (and free school), the first black church, and the first home for the aged were the fruits of Methodism.¹⁹ Methodists were the first Americans to free their slaves (although not all of them did). They, too, had their share of hardship, brutality, and suffering, especially during the War of Independence when they were accused of siding with England. Methodist preachers had to face tough people. In some places where no religious teaching was available colonists were total pagans without any morality and Shaford could say that they were "as wild as bears."²⁰ About Methodism's converts Francis Asbury wrote in his journal: "Men, who neither feared God, nor regarded man--swearers, liars, cock-fighters,

¹⁹A. B. Hyde, *The Story of Methodism* (Springfield, MA: Willey, 1889), p. 368.

²⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 386-387.

card-players, horse racers, drunkards, etc., are now so changed as to become new men."²¹ As early as 1776 Robert Strawbridge would leave his farm and go out to preach in the backwoods.²² A few years later, under the impulsion and leadership of Francis Asbury, Methodist preachers started their ministry to the wilderness and forest settlers, following what became the frontier. Methodist preachers cared for the "strangers" (new immigrants), especially the Germans, and German Conferences were in existence until 1943. In 1799 Francis Asbury ordained the first black American minister, Richard Allen, who became, in 1816, the first bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church. For years American Methodism remained faithful to its true Wesleyan tradition, going to the people, "to the needy who were not being reached by the Established Church," and was accordingly the great American Religion until, in its turn, it became an established church among others.

Consequently it seems perfectly legitimate to say that social action and service²³ were a great factor, if not the main factor, in the success of early Methodism, both in England and in the United States of America. Of course, we assume that absolute faith and total commitment are necessary prerequisites. Without them there could not

²¹*The History of American Methodism* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1964), I, 112.

²²*Ibid.*, I, 75-76.

²³Which will be called "Social Christianity," see below, Chapter 4.

be any religious movement or reform at all.

A striking parallel can be found between the elements of success in early Methodism and early Christianity up to the time of Constantine. In both there were:

- Hostility from the established religion and the upper classes (with exceptions)
- Persecution, martyrdom
- Special love for the poor, the oppressed, the reviled, the sinners
- Assurance given to them of the love of God and Christ, building up of their dignity and true humanity
- Solidarity, mutual help and comfort
- Benevolence extended to non-Christians (or non-Methodists).

Christianity really means that "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). Although he is its "light and salt" a true Christian does not belong to the world. It follows that the non-converted feel true Christians are different and a sense of hostility can develop. But it seems to be the rule that a successful religion cannot spread without a general atmosphere of opposition, even suffering and martyrdom. Is this the sword Jesus brought and the cross he asked his disciples to carry? John Wesley was fully aware of this necessary separatedness:

To speak a rough truth, I do not desire any intercourse with any persons of quality in England, I mean for my own sake. They do me no good, and I fear I can do none to them.²⁴

How hard it is to be shallow enough for a polite audience.²⁵

²⁴John Wesley, *The Letters* (London: Epworth Press, 1938), IV, 260.

²⁵John Wesley Bready, *England: Before and After Wesley*, quoted by Sherwin, p. 48.

Riches are equally a hindrance to the loving our neighbor as ourselves, that is, the loving all mankind.²⁶

The poor are the Christians.²⁷

This is an aspect of Methodism we do not like to be reminded of today. And yet thanks to John Wesley's deliberate attitude and action Methodism was "the most effective mass movement in eighteenth century England--a great upwelling of Christian faith and of social reform as well."²⁸

What happened, as we can now see it in retrospect was revolutionary in fact and consequence. [Oppressed] men and women found themselves sloughing off their shackles of servility, and becoming the available leadership cadre for one of the most effective, less disruptive social revolutions on record.²⁹

B. METHODISM AS AN EVANGELICAL AND MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

The above section shows Methodism as an evangelical movement oriented to the poor and the neglected. In early Methodism social action and service, and evangelism cannot be separated. Methodism was a socially oriented evangelical and missionary movement.

The evangelical and missionary aspect of Methodism is well known, the "technical" reasons³⁰ for its success have been thoroughly

²⁶John Wesley, *The Works*, II, 397, quoted by Sherwin, p. 50.

²⁷Wesley, *Letters*, III, 229, and VII, 343.

²⁸Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), p. 18.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 30.

³⁰To be distinguished from its three main characteristics or great factors of success which I see on a higher level. See above, p. 3.

analyzed. It will be enough to list them briefly in order to keep them in mind when we will seek remedies to the present decline; the specific reasons for the success of American Methodism will also be listed. All together we may recognize five of them:

1. *An Intensive use of Lay Evangelists.* Those were unordained missionaries and preachers. They had a good knowledge of the people they wanted to reach. Their faith, dedication, self-denial and self-sacrifice were exceptional. They were determined to go to the people whatever the circumstances might be. They were truly apostles and saints, worthy followers of John Wesley and Jesus. Their prototype can be recognized in the well-known picture of "a Pioneer Missionary, found frozen to death in the attitude of prayer," in the woods.³¹

2. *An adequate Organization and Administration.* There was no rigid structure or hierarchy. The flexibility and mobility of the societies, bands, classes, circuits made possible the active participation of all members by public confession, reciprocal guidance, social control. These principles have been recently rediscovered by the western world and rationalized in the dynamics of the small groups. However, the communist parties have used them for more than fifty years in their "cells" where public confession is "self-criticism"; they have been a great factor in their world expansion.

3. *A Strong Leadership.* The natural and spiritual authority

³¹As in Hyde, p. 450.

of John Wesley and Francis Asbury unified and vivified the ideals and methods of the movement. They kept the organization under strict control. In the United States of America the frontier-minded leadership of Francis Asbury set an example.

4. *A Simple and Democratic Doctrine.* This doctrine stressed the love of God for sinners with the promise of "free grace for all," without rigid or shocking dogmas, without rigid cultic observance.

5. *A Deep Interest in Education.* This was evidenced by the early development of mass literature and Sunday School, then by the development of schools and colleges.

In addition to these American Methodism found a most favorable condition in the tremendous demographic and economic expansion of the country. Methodist settlers would request Methodist preaching, and in this manner they did very effectively contribute to the propagation of their faith.

In order to help the reader have a general view of the geographical expansion of American Methodism I made the following table whose dates come from several chapters of *The History of American Methodism*. Only the main steps are recorded. (See page 22.)

C. METHODISM AS AN ECUMENICAL MOVEMENT WITH AN ECUMENICAL THEOLOGY

The Ecumenical spirit of Methodism originated in John Wesley himself. He founded the Societies as a movement inside the Church of England and strongly opposed any separatist tendency. He showed his

DIAGRAM I

EXPANSION OF AMERICAN METHODISM

<u>Date</u>	<u>Home</u>	<u>Foreign</u>
1776	24 preachers, 5,000 members	
1783	82 preachers, 14,000 members	
1784-1799		American Methodists in Nova Scotia
1787	Free African Society	
1796	57,000 members. Beginning of the African Methodist Episcopal Church Zion	
1804	115,000 members	
1805	First preachers West of the Mississippi and in Louisiana	
1816	Organizing convention of the African Methodist Episcopal Church	
1817		First Methodist preacher in Texas
1819		Missionary & Bible Society
1820	<u>Missionary Society of the Methodist Church</u> -Recognition by the General Conference of a ministry to the Indians -Beginning of the language missions to immigrants	
1829	Missions to sailors in Boston	
1831	Mission district in Illinois Methodism in Kansas and Nebraska	
1833		Liberia
1835		Texas Mission
1835-1943	German language conferences	
1842		South America (Argentina)
1847	California	China
1849		Germany
1855		Sweden
1856		India
1865		Mexico
1873		Japan
1885		Korea
1886	Alaska	
1899		Cuba, Philippines
1903		Sarawak(New Borneo)
1954		Nepal

generous spirit of tolerance in one of his most famous sermons: "Catholic Spirit." It was his deep and sincere conviction that although Christians are united by the same love of God they may differ in opinions and in the ways they worship. The important point is that their hearts be right with God and with each other's heart. In his view, however, freedom of opinion did not mean latitudinarianism and he set some common basic standards. A Christian must:

- be a firm believer in God and Christ
- love God and man with visible evidence of that love in daily life
- worship according to scriptural and rational forms
- participate in communion, fasting, and public devotions
- listen to the Gospel.

In this way alone could Catholic Spirit be an expression of Universal Love.³²

Another important document showing his ecumenical spirit is his letter *To a Roman Catholic*, written in Dublin, on July 18, 1749,³³ in which he gives a list of basic beliefs or attitudes for those who share a common doctrinal ground in the Christian faith:

- Judge not, that you shall not be judged
- Recognize that malice, hatred, revenge, bitterness are wrong
- Recognize that bitterness is on both sides
- Recognize that God has made all of us and that His Son has bought all of us with his own blood.
- Believe in One Omnipotent God Father of all things, especially Father of his only Son begotten from eternity.
- Believe in Jesus of Nazareth as Saviour, Messiah anointed with the Holy Ghost, Prophet and King; Son of God, Lord of all, made man, born of the Virgin Mary, crucified, dead and raised, sharing the glory of God in Heaven.

³² John Wesley, "Catholic Spirit," in his *Forty-Four Sermons* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), pp. 442ff.

³³ Wesley, *Letters*, III, 7.

- Believe in the Holy Spirit,
- Believe in the Church,
- Believe in the forgiveness of sins, resurrection of the body,
hell and eternal happiness.

Of course this high ideal of tolerance did not prevent John Wesley from engaging in theological and doctrinal controversies; but it set the tone of Methodism as regards the ecumenical movement, and its ecumenical theology. In this sense too it can be said that John Wesley was an "ecumenical theologian."³⁴

1. Ecumenical Movement

For almost a century Methodists have officially affirmed and implemented their ecumenical spirit, first in Methodism itself in 1881 with the First Ecumenical Methodist Conference in London, then among the Protestant Churches both at the national and world levels, and by reuniting themselves in the United States of America. Many Methodists, clergy or laymen have been active leaders or initiators in the ecumenical movement. Among them Tillett, Mott, and Oxnam stand out.

Inside Methodism, in the United States of America, the reunification was initiated among the three great Methodist bodies when, in 1874 delegates from the Methodist Episcopal Church attended the General Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church South. Later on the Protestant Methodist Church joined the movement and in 1939 the

³⁴Albert C. Outler, *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), p. xii.

reunification was completed. At the world level the first Ecumenical Methodist Conference was followed by meetings of the same nature every ten years; nowadays they are held every five years.

Among the Protestant churches Methodists were instrumental in the creation of the National Council of Churches (U.S.A.). In 1950 they joined with others the Consultation on Church Union (C.O.C.U.), and in 1968, after two centuries of friendly relations they united with the Evangelical United Brethren. On the international scene Dr. John R. Mott made Methodism famous by devoting all his time and energies, from 1891 to his death in 1955, to ecumenism. He was the one man most responsible for the creation of four great ecumenical organizations: the World's Student Christian Federation, the International Missionary Council, the World Alliance of the YMCA and the World Council of Churches. In 1946 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize and it has been said that without him, quite simply, it is hard to imagine whether there would have been any ecumenical movement at all.³⁵

2. Ecumenical Theology

Methodist theology bore the marks first of grace then of liberalism and rationalism. At the very beginning John Wesley's message "had a double emphasis, which has remained with Methodism to this day." First was the Gospel of God's grace, offered to all men

³⁵*The History of American Methodism*, III, 565-578.

and equal to every human need. Second was the moral ideal which this ideal presents to men. The Bible he declares, knows no salvation which is not salvation from sin. He called men to holiness of life, and his holiness, he insisted, is "social holiness," the love and service of their fellowmen. Methodism meant "Christianity in earnest."³⁶

From this basis Methodist theology adapted itself to the scientific and philosophical evolution of the last two centuries, under the influence of men like Watson, Miley and Knudson.

As regards the concept of sin the Methodist theology proceeded from John Wesley's scriptural notion of original sin, guilt and depravity implying man's natural inclination to do evil to Watson's idea of fall and privation of the Spirit. Then Miley denied original guilt and stressed the influence of the Holy Spirit in the renewal of man. Finally Knudson confirmed the rejection of original guilt and depravity. He brought in a moral conception of righteousness and perfection; for him sin is a "moral imperfection" which originated in man's personal freedom, redemption is assumed and always available.

A parallel evolution can be found in the doctrine of grace. For John Wesley grace was an atoning and sanctifying gift of God's love through the redemptive sacrifice of Christ; but this concept should not lead to antinomianism although grace is free "in all" and "for all" (a rejection of the Calvinist concept of predestination).

³⁶*The Book of Discipline . . . 1972, p. 8.*

In the ensuing evolution the doctrine of prevenient grace gave way to man's increasing responsibility in his salvation and the doctrine of atonement was explained by Watson as an act of God's justice not as a "ransom" which could be interpreted as an act of revenge; Watson also gave a greater prominence to the universality of atonement than did John Wesley. For Knudson Christian faith has its foundation in the freedom of man and the personality of God. If justification, regeneration, and sanctification are from God, repentance and faith are the choice and the responsibility of man.

However it is in the domain of revelation that the progress of Methodist theology toward rationalization was the most evident. According to John Wesley revelation is unquestionably based in Scripture and ascertained by evangelical experience. It is a saving encounter. Watson too asserted that Scripture was the source of revelation but he thought that it should be rationally established before it becomes operative and he tried to prove the "divine authority" of the Bible. Miley walked along the same path trying to further reduce the gap between revelation and reason with the help of religious experience and systematic theology. Knudson did not attempt to rationalize on revelation, he rather took religion and revelation as long established facts and tried to rationally explain their content. Religion, as an a priori experience is interpreted by reason.³⁷

³⁷The substance of this section comes from Robert E. Chiles, *Theological Transition in American Methodism: 1790-1935* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965).

These theologians liberalized still further the already liberal doctrine of "free grace for all" and tried to make religion and faith understandable by the rational minds of intellectuals. Without imperative dogmas, with five different creeds in its official book for worship,³⁸ and a Social Creed³⁹ Methodist theology, if properly explained, may appeal equally to the intuitive and the scientific minds and may present to all Christian denominations a common nucleus of minimum beliefs.

³⁸*The Book of Worship* (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1964), pp. 179-181.

³⁹*The Book of Discipline . . . 1972*, p. 97.

CHAPTER 2

THE DECLINE OF METHODISM

In spite of these great factors of success Methodism lost its impetus and has been steadily declining for thirty years. After a presentation of the facts I will try to interpret them. The study will be limited to the American United Methodist Church.

A. DECLINE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH IN THE U.S.A.

There cannot be any true evaluation of the evolution of a given denomination without comparison with the parallel evolution of the other denominations and the total population of the country.

Comparison with other denominations has been made by Dean M. Kelly.⁴⁰ He shows that while the liberal churches are losing members year after year, the conservative churches like the Baptists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Latter Day Saints, the Seventh Day Adventists and the Roman Catholics are growing. I will not duplicate his work here. I will only show the relative evolution of the membership of the United Methodist Church compared to the growth of the population of the U.S.A. The final element of comparison will be a M/TP ratio, that is the national percentage of United Methodists in the total population. The data come from the Statistical Abstract of the United States and

⁴⁰Dean M. Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

the General Minutes.

<u>Year's End</u>	<u>United Methodists</u> (in thousands)	<u>Total Population</u> (in thousands)	<u>M/TP</u> (%)
1940	7,400	131,900	5.606
1944	8,100	133,700	6.090
1948	8,700	146,600	5.986
1952	9,200	156,000	5.897
1956	9,400	165,000	5.696
1960	10,200	179,000	5.702
1964	10,300	194,000	5.309
1968 ⁴¹	11,000	197,000	5.584
1969	10,800	200,000	5.400
1970	10,700	206,000	5.189
1971	10,500	208,000	5.048
1972	10,300 ⁴²	210,000 ⁴³	4.905

(See Diagram II)

In twenty-eight years, from 1944 to 1972 the M/TP ratio has almost continuously decreased from 6.090% to 4.905% which represents a decline of 19.6% in relative importance. The trend then is firmly established.

B. DECLINE OF THE INFLUENCE OF AMERICAN METHODISM IN THE WORLD

As a logical consequence United Methodism Foreign Missions are dwindling sharply. During the last five years the number of missionaries dropped from 1,350 to 922, and yet, in 1972 alone the World Division of the Board of Global Ministries "had to pull \$780,000 out

⁴¹Union with the Evangelical United Brethren.

⁴²Estimate.

⁴³The last figure released by the Census Bureau at the time of this writing was 210,692,000 on September 1, 1973.

of reserve to maintain missionary salary support."⁴⁴

When compared to the growth of the world population, when compared to the increase in missionary activity by other denominations such as the Baptists, the L.D.S., and the Witnesses of Jehovah, when we consider the many lands still closed to the propagation of the Gospel the situation looks more catastrophic and it is hard to understand such optimistic statements as the following:

We must not confuse the number of missionaries with their effectiveness in preaching the Word of God and witnessing to God's Kingdom in other lands . . . Reducing missionary personnel by 35 per cent need not be retrenchment in mission. It is a recognition of the success of the Christian mission in its basic form for the past 150 years and of dynamic new alignments and new kind of interdependence. It is a sign of respect for our co-workers in Christ who lead the new autonomous churches. It is abiding by the law in new nations which restrict immigration and the activity of non citizens.⁴⁵

Such an optimism can be dangerous when, in fact, "Maintenance of overseas forces has finally boiled down to strictly a financial matter," as we can read in the same issue of *Newscope*, as referred to in note 44.

Meanwhile the Baptists launched the "Underground Christian Mission" which smuggles Bibles through the Iron Curtain, and the Garden Grove Community Church maintains a team of translators who translate the Bible into the new common Chinese tongue of Communist China.

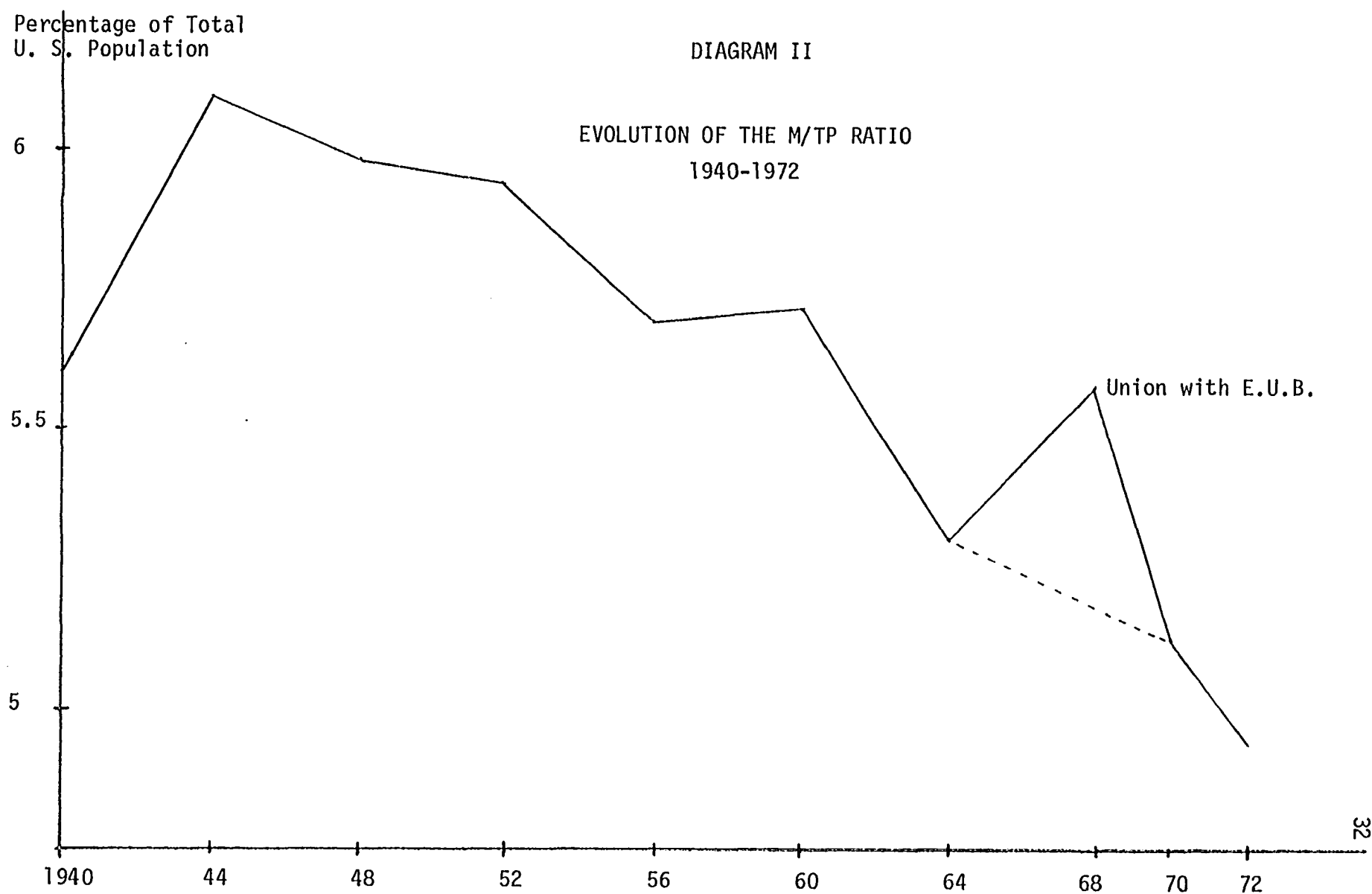
⁴⁴"Overseas Missionaries Encouraged to Appeal to Constituents," *Newscope*, July 20, 1973, p. 3.

⁴⁵Prof. John B. Hold, quoted by John T. Seamands "Our Overseas Missions: Are we Retrenching or Retooling? *Together*, April 1973, p. 21.

Percentage of Total
U. S. Population

DIAGRAM II

EVOLUTION OF THE M/TP RATIO
1940-1972



C. DECLINE OF THE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
IN THE SOUTHWEST OF THE U.S.A.

It is a well known fact the M/TP ratio in the West is much lower than the national average. The percentages for 1971 were 1.64% in California, 2.51% in Arizona, 1.38% in Nevada, 2.58% in Oregon, and 2.95% in Washington.⁴⁶ This fact could give hope for a dynamic expansion. Instead, in the Southern California-Arizona-Nevada Conference the gap between the population and the number of United Methodists is growing drastically.⁴⁷

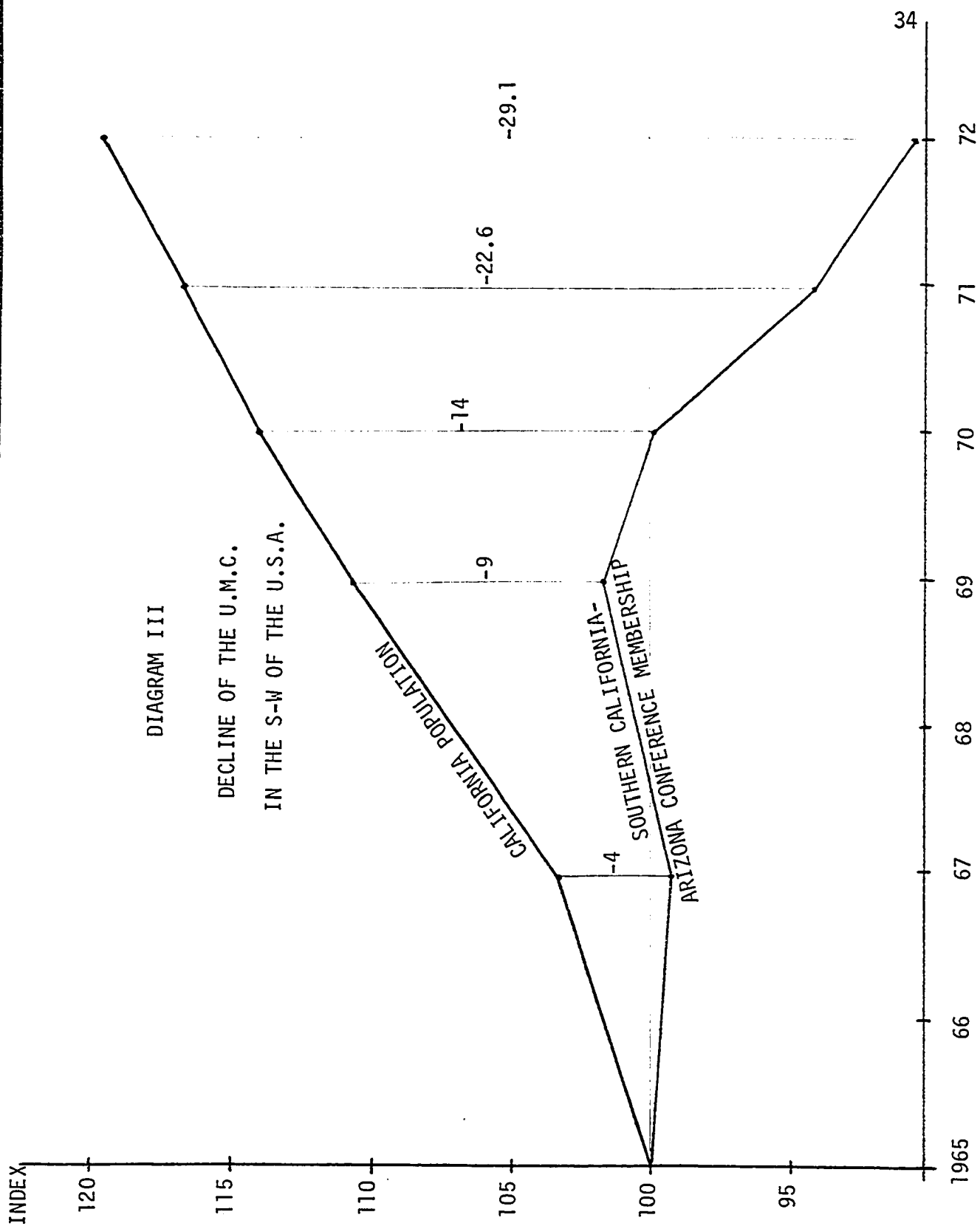
<u>Year's End</u>	<u>Conference Membership</u>		<u>California Population</u>		<u>Gap</u> (%)
	<u>Total</u>	<u>Index</u>	<u>Total</u> (in thou- sands)	<u>Index</u>	
1965	265,000	100	18,400	100	
1967	263,000	99.3	19,000	103.3	- 4%
1969	270,000	101.9	20,400	110.9	- 9%
1970	265,000	100	21,000	114.1	-14%
1971	250,000	94.3	21,500	116.9	-22.6%
1972	240,000	90.5	22,000	119.6	-29.1%

(See Diagram III)

The situation is still worse than it appears in the above table. As it was difficult to find the exact population for the territory of the Conference I compared the decrease of the United Methodists in the territory with the growth of the population in the State of California. In fact, in Southern California, Southern Nevada,

⁴⁶Percentages computed from figures found in the Statistical Abstract of the U.S.A. and the General Minutes.

⁴⁷Percentages computed from figures published in the Statistical Abstract of the U.S.A. and the Minutes of the Conference.



and Arizona the rate of population growth is higher than the rate for the State of California as a whole.

D. INTERPRETATION OF THE FACTS

From an evangelical and missionary, socially-oriented movement Methodism became an established white middle-class church. "Movement" means dynamic, "established" means static. Consequently when it reached the West Coast the Methodist sub-phylum was unable to rebound, to grow and develop on itself as the M/TP ratio for the Western States clearly shows (see above, section C).

Being an established white middle-class Protestant church, the United Methodist Church declined as the other established white middle-class Protestant churches, for the same main reasons which are:

- A general decline of Christianity,
- A general decline of confidence in institutions,
- Loss of spiritual leadership and authority,
- Loss of moral leadership and authority,
- Inability to adapt to the philosophical and social evolution,
- Inadequate Christian education,
- To these reasons I will add three other ones which are more specific to the United Methodist Church:
- Inadequate structures,
- Lack of a clear and firm religious policy
- Loss of her tradition and vocation.

1. General Decline of Christianity

With the tremendous expansion of Marxism, with the population increase of the eastern world and the missionary activity of eastern religions, with the decline of faith and missionary fervor in the western world, the decline of Christianity is now a general and continuous phenomenon. It can be estimated that Christianity which

represented 34% of the world in 1900 will probably represent only 16% in A.D. 2000 if Christians do not reconsider seriously their "Great Commission" to preach the Gospel to the nations. This would be a decline of 50% in one century.

Even in the western world, cradle and first expansion field of Christianity, the Christian faith is not the most characteristic feature anymore. In Europe, except for Italy, Spain and Portugal, less than 10% of the population attend church regularly. In this country according to the Gallup Poll about 40% of the population claim they go to church today, against 49% in 1955, but in fact less than 20% can be counted as really active members. When they are liberated from family, neighborhood or milieu conformism many just drop the church altogether as demonstrated in the West where a great number of the population are newcomers. They abandon the church with their roots and family tradition as if it was an imposed obligation: against a national average of 40% in church attendance the percentage is only 33% in the West. As for the clergy it is estimated that 10,000 ministers, priests, and rabbis, that is 3% of the total number, are known to resign each year in the U.S.A.⁴⁸

2. General Decline of Confidence in the Institutions

There were times when the church was respected even by the

⁴⁸ Percentages and figures taken from Joseph Newman (ed.) *The Religious Reawakening in America* (Washington D.C.: U.S. News and World Report, 1972), p. 17.

non-believers; but our generation witnesses a growing distrust in our western world toward the leading institutions, including the established churches. This is especially true in the U.S.A. as is shown by the comparative results of two surveys made in a five year interval (1966-1971) by the Harris Poll. In response to a question about their confidence in the listed institutions, the persons consulted gave a positive answer according to the following percentages:⁴⁹

	<u>1966</u>	<u>1971</u>
Medicine	72	61
Banks and Financial Institutions	67	36
Military	62	27
Education	61	27
Scientists	56	32
Major Companies	55	27
Mental Health and Psychiatry	51	35
Local Retailers	48	24
Organized Religion	41	27
Federal Executive Branch	41	23
U. S. Supreme Court	31	23
The Press	29	18

The rapid decline in the self-confidence of the nation shows a deep disillusionment and is very alarming: "Every kingdom divided against itself is laid waste, and no city or house divided against itself will stand" (Matthew 12:25). Some remarks can be made about the established churches (Organized Religion):

- Even in 1966 the church was among the lowest ranking institutions --number 9 out of 12, with only 41% indicating confidence;
- In 1971 the public's confidence was still lower: 27%--but since the decline was even greater for other institutions (Military, Business, Banks) the church rose to the 5th place, *ex-aequo* with the Military, Major Companies, and Education,

⁴⁹*Newsletter* of the Research Institute of America (September 1971), reproduced by permission of Louis Harris and Associates.

--It is a sad fact to reflect upon that, in 1971, although 40% of the population claimed they went to church, only 27% confessed they trusted the church.

3. Loss of Spiritual Leadership and Authority

The church is not the recognized spiritual leader it used to be. The Gospel is not preached in its integrity in most churches, and, still worse is not lived by the majority of "churchgoers." We forgot that the Good News was for the poor. Many ministers seem afraid of evangelizing and of educating lay preachers for evangelical purpose. We equate "membership drive" with "evangelism," and we forgot that the early church and Methodism were the fruits of the laity at work in the world. We forgot that every Christian should be a missionary, a witness to God and Jesus, "the salt and the light of the world."

As a result, those who yearn for the knowledge of God and spiritual growth leave the established churches and go to the Jesus People, the Pentecostal movements, to Billy Graham who in fact does not make so many new Christians but rather empties the pews of the liberal denominations.⁵⁰ I know three instances of teenagers or young adults who left the Methodist Church because "it was not really Christian," because they found "no one to pray with." Yet this shift in itself is not necessarily bad. Which is really alarming is the rapidly increasing number of adepts of spiritualism, witchcraft,

⁵⁰From Newman.

black magic and even of the Church of Satan,⁵¹ all substitutes for spirituality which supersede the church by default.

4. Loss of Moral Leadership and Authority

The church shows so much laxity in moral standards that we can wonder whether there are any left at all. It seems that, in the Liberal Churches, we have forgotten that the "go, and sin no more" after repentance is the way to salvation. Sinners are to be loved above all, but to help them attain their salvation. In this domain too, the church lost her leadership. She remains indifferent and silent in the midst of the most tragic abuses of freedom--misunderstood freedom. ("Freedom, how many crimes are committed in thy name!") These abuses of misunderstood freedom are the source of almost all evils in our civilization. There are many illustrations, and I will just cite a few examples:

a. By far the highest rate of divorce in the world; 30% of the marriages end in a divorce in this country which places individual freedom above everything. As a result there are more than one million runaway children, with the highest rate in juvenile delinquency and drug consumption in the western world.

b. Encouragement of the exploitation of the weak, illiterate, destitute and defenseless in view of more profits: In the May-June

⁵¹ From Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972).

1973 issue of the *Capitalist Reporter* there is a detailed article on how to make a quick fortune by opening a blood bank because, as it is impudently stated, there is no legal control whatsoever placed upon such an industry, in any state. The Catholic workers of the House of Hospitality in Los Angeles' Skid Row⁵² can testify about the number of "donors" who sell their blood to death for \$4 or \$5 a pint--the same blood which is sold to hospitals for \$40 a pint. In the October 15, 1973 issue of *Time* we can learn how Mexicans are smuggled through the border and carried in trucks (when not unloaded in the desert) to Chicago for \$250 a head. There, they will find employers who will pay them 90¢ an hour.

c. The hysterical display of violence on TV screens, even in cartoons for children. One costly consequence is that all contractors have to hire security guards to protect their construction sites against the many acts of vandalism committed by elementary school children.

d. The expansion of pornography on the stage, in literature, in films, in bookstores and theaters "for adults," in topless and bottomless bars, clubs, restaurants, with solicitation by mail, with the creation of "swap wife clubs." When Hitler decided to invade Poland he first invaded the country with pornographic literature in an attempt to break its energy and will to fight. His propagandists

⁵²House of Hospitality, 605 North Cummings, Los Angeles, CA 90033.

knew the destructive effect of immorality and pornography on characters. What effective action did the Liberal Churches take against this evil in our society? Did we forget that "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander. These are what defile a man . . ." (Matthew 15: 19-20)?

Not only does the church remain indifferent to evil in many instances, she may even encourage vice. As far as I know, at least two Methodist ministers ostensibly "married" two couples of pederasts (male homosexuals), one in San Francisco, one in Boston. If it is the absolute and sacred duty of the Christian Church to love and try to save all persons whatsoever their predicament or sins may be, it is an outright betrayal of Jesus' teachings to advertise and encourage fornication in any form, and to help increase the sexual frenzy of our times. This unfortunate instance can only be the result of ignorance. Only a very small percentage of male homosexuality represents real pathological cases, the rest comes from perverted practice requiring a painful "training." A great Methodist evangelist, Alan Walker, shows a sound knowledge of the problem when he quotes Dr. Daniel Capon on homosexuality.

There seems to be little, if any, evidence for heredity, constitutional or chemical factors in the genesis of homosexuality. Homosexuality is not born, it is made, and with difficulty at that.⁵³

⁵³ Alan Walker, *Jesus the Liberator* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 56-57.

In most cases homosexuals are psychologically and physically curable. However, when they are let free or even encouraged they can be the most cruel sadists as the press revealed once more to the public in the second half of 1973. Twenty-nine homosexual murders of teenagers in Texas were discovered only because one of the murderers killed his accomplice. Six-year-old boys were tortured to make homosexual pornographic films in Los Angeles. Arson of a bar by a jealous homosexual resulted in a fire where thirty persons perished in San Francisco. Most ministers when dealing with homosexuality do not really know its implications. Who knows or remembers that the Nazi extermination camps were mostly run by homosexuals? Yet, their perverse imagination in finding new refined tortures have been reported by thousands of victims or eye witnesses.

5. Inability to Adapt to Philosophical and Social Evolution

After the enlightenment the church lost the intellectuals, or--to be fair, the great majority of the intellectuals, those who were not intellectual enough to transcend their "science" and adjust it to their faith, or vice versa to adjust their faith to their science. The church has been charged with "obscurantism," and rightly so. She condemned Galileo, evolution, Teilhard de Chardin. Some great denominations still keep as dogmas to be accepted under the penalty of damnation the virgin birth (what difference does it make after all?) and the resurrection of the "flesh." Some sects still maintain that the world was created in six days some 6,000 years ago,

and that the time is near when the wolves will sleep with the sheep, and when humanity will not need physicians and lawyers anymore. How can modern man accept such articles of faith? In insisting on such archaisms the church failed in her mission which is to preach the good news of divine love and redemption in order to bring more and more souls to eternal life. She forgot that God is Lord of all, including the intellectuals--and she lost them.

On the social scene she has become the church of the ruling class, or as J. C. Hoekendijk says, the Church of the "respectable." When the great fortunes of the industrial revolution were built upon the murderous working conditions imposed upon children, women, and underfed men, the Church as a whole said nothing and her age-old ministry to the oppressed and the exploited was taken over in Europe by the socialist and communist parties, and one generation later in the U.S.A. by the trade-unions. The Church too often ignored the new industrial cities (which gave early Methodism the occasion for its birth and growth) and was never representative of the proletariat. If industrial workers have nowadays a pretty fair share of the profits, in the western world we must admit that it is to be credited mainly to the action of socialism, communism and trade-unions. Industrial workers may enjoy a strong economic position. This is especially true in this country where a garbage collector (Teamster) makes more money than an assistant professor in an average university, where the industrial wages range from \$4 to \$12 an hour, and where substantial fringe benefits may in fact double the compensation. But these happy

results owe very little to the Church, and in return the industrial worker owes very little to the Church.

6. Inadequate Christian Education

Paul B. Irwin once stated in his 1972 class on Youth Ministry: "Too many Sunday School teachers never read the Bible passages they are supposed to comment on."⁵⁴ Is this why Sunday School attendance is declining so rapidly--a 30% decline in 17 years according to Ewart Watts, church school publications editor of the United Methodist Publishing House?⁵⁵

According to a survey taken in the Fall of 1971 by a United Methodist Church to which I belonged the three greatest expectations of the membership were:

- a. Find in the Church meaning for personal existence (74%)
- b. Strengthen their faith and devotion (67%)
- c. Raise their children properly in the Christian faith (63%)

When asked if these expectations were met the affirmative answers were only 35% for (a), 37% for (b), 33% for (c). And yet the pastor there is a good minister by all established standards. He is very concerned with Christian education and earnestly applies the skills he learned in the seminary and in the other churches where he served. The congregation loves and respects him, he has been with them for eight

⁵⁴Quoted by permission.

⁵⁵"Publication Board Votes \$400,000 to Pensioners, Decreases," *Newscope*, November 9, 1973, p. 4.

years. What is wrong then?

This is not an isolated case. The same kind of feeling among the congregation is revealed by the survey Frank Finkbiner made in Methodist churches in Southern California in 1970. To the question "What is the Church's main strength?" only 4.2% among the active members and 4.9% among the drop-outs answered that the Church "teaches morality and character." Correlatively, to the question "List one needed change in the Church," 9.4% of the active members and 10.9% of the drop-outs answered "Use Bible more." That was the second answer in importance; it is interesting to note that the first answer was "Involvement in community and social issues" (12.5% of the active members, 4.4% of the drop-outs).⁵⁶

Nationwide the North American Interchurch Study (NAIS) of 1970 shows that the third most important concern (out of 14) suggested as a possible answer to the question "What a Church should do" was "Provide religious instruction to members." The first concern was "Win others to Christ" and the second "Provide worship for members." Here too, it is interesting to note that the next ranking answer was "Help to the needy."⁵⁷

There should be no distinction between preaching or teaching as we find in our churches. Both are just two different aspects of

⁵⁶"The Church Drop-Out: Why?" *News Pulse*, September 1971, p. 2.

⁵⁷Alan K. Waltz, and Edwin H. Maynard, "United Methodists in the Middle," *The Interpreter*, May 1972, pp. 5-9.

Christian education, and in my opinion a pastor should give as much time to teaching as he does to sermon preparation. Youth education should be a major concern, if not the primary concern because the youth of today are the Christians of tomorrow. As for the adults I will let Harvey J. Seifert draw the conclusion. About the results of Frank Finkbiner's survey one of his comments was:

This suggests that there has been a great gap even in serving those persons whom we have most easily attracted. Apparently we have not made it clear to them what the foundations of the Christian faith are, how important they are, and how every person, even under the most fortunate circumstances, has ultimate issues that he must face in life.⁵⁸

7. Inadequate Structure of the UMC

It is not until 1972 that the United Methodist Church took, with the general Council on Ministries, a major step toward a continuous form of government (although it keeps the character of a substitute). For decades the head of a Church of more than 5,000,000 members was only a General Conference of 1,000 people meeting for a few weeks once every four years. In a time of swift changes when important decisions shaping the future have to be made sometimes within a few days the inadequacy of such a structure is a great handicap. In the spiritual domain the College of Bishops has no authority to define the official theology and the religious policy of the Church.

As any other democratic assembly of people the United Methodist Church, in order to be effective, needs a legislative, an executive

⁵⁸"The Church Drop-Out: Why?" *News Pulse*, September 1971, p. 4.

and a judiciary under one head which could be collegiate in form and responsible before the legislative or the judiciary. But I will not insist on this aspect which is not within the subject matter of this dissertation.

8. Lack of a Clear and Firm Religious Policy

This is the logical consequence of the weaknesses already examined, especially the inadequacy of the structure. Without any clear and firm religious policy, for the short term and the long term, the Church tends to follow the trends of the public opinion expressed through the more than 1,000 delegates to the General Conference. It follows that the Church, instead of showing courage and vision, rather helps thicken the smoke screen which hides the real issues. Left without any guidelines (I do not say "orders" or "directives") many local pastors waste tremendous amount of intellectual and spiritual energy to preach on ecology, local or national political problems, energy crisis, etc. . . without clearly relating them to the "foundations of the Christian faith" and the "ultimate issues" that every person must face in life.

The Church will not be a "change agent" until she attacks the root of all evils: lack of faith. Is not it obvious that when everyone obeys Jesus' two great commandments all other problems will be solved? "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . . You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is

no other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31). Of course, this is utopic, this is an over simplification. But is not this the clearest theology, the clearest social creed, the heart of the Christian message? For sixty years John Wesley did nothing else than preaching on these fundamental themes, pointing out some of their implications when needed, and he made a social revolution. One of the characteristics of a powerful policy is that it can be formulated in a few words.

9. The U.M.C. Lost her Tradition and Vocation

The preceding remark brings us to the most specific reason for the decline of Methodism. The church has forsaken the evangelical tradition and the social vocation which were the secrets of its powerful growth. Where are the societies, classes and bands? Where is the brotherly love expressed in small groups in the form of mutual confession, guidance and admonition? It is not even required anymore to read and comment on the "General Rules" in the congregation (and to adapt them to our time). All that was the secret of the success of early Methodism has been taken over by other religious groups, or even by the Marxists. As one student said recently in a Wesleyan class: "John Wesley is partially responsible for the Methodist Church of today." I should rather say that he is not responsible at all and would strongly deny any fatherhood to the main Methodist denomination of our times. Who would recognize our Church in his definition of Methodism?

Methodism, so called, is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church. . . . This old religion . . . is no other than love, the love of God and of all mankind. . . . This love is the great medicine of life. . . . Wherever this is, there are virtue and happiness going hand in hand. . . . This religion of love and joy and peace has its seat in the inmost soul; but is ever showing itself by its fruit . . . spreading virtue and happiness all around it.⁵⁹

or in Outler's description of the early Methodists:

In and through the Methodist societies . . . the Word made audible was also made visible and thus became even more effective, as the societies became evangelistic agencies in their own right. Thousands of men and women who may never had heard Wesley preach . . . were attracted to the Christian life and were actually evangelized (converted, born again, nurtured and matured) by the outreaching and ingathering influence of the local Methodist people. It was not only their preaching that made its impact in the world but also their lives on the job, in the market place, in their redemptive involvement in the social agonies of their times.⁶⁰

⁵⁹Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit*, p. 34.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 28.

PART II

SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY, ITS BIBLICAL FOUNDATION

When everything goes wrong, when hope and confidence fade away, it might be useful to make a pilgrimage to the Source, to rediscover that which was lost, to regenerate our spirit at the original light of a great tradition, to cling to that which is perennial and infallible.

We are extremely privileged to have behind us a rich and glorious past whose teachings are the treasure hidden in the field. Why not take advantage of these teachings instead of rushing for the new and the post-something without even knowing the fundamentals of the problems we are dealing with? Why not dig the field of our tradition? *Visita Interiora Terrae, Rectificandoque, Invenies Occultum Lapidem* (Visit the interior of the earth, and in amending you will find the hidden stone, the true medicine).

In the second part of this dissertation I will try to show that the true character of Christianity is to be revolutionary and social, and that this character explains the success of the Early Church as it explains the success of Early Methodism. Then I will try to find some biblical guidelines for our current needs.

CHAPTER 3

JESUS AND THE EARLY CHURCH

The object of the faith of the Church is certainly not the historical Jesus¹ about whom we know so little, but the historic Christ of the Kerygma. We find salvation in Christ while the historical Jesus, as far as we know, did not demand faith in himself and did not offer salvation through himself.

However, there is a great danger in making too radical a distinction between Jesus and Christ--the danger to create a hypothetic and mythical deity without any human significance. We must not forget that Jesus became the Exalted Lord precisely because he was Jesus. It would be more accurate and probably more meaningful to say that the object of our faith is (or should be) Jesus-Christ.

Conversely, the new sects who proclaim Jesus, and only Jesus, miss altogether the point at the opposite extreme of the spectrum. Jesus and his teachings cannot be understood without considering their impact on the Early Church. This impact together with the appearances led the early Christians to acknowledge him as the Christ, "according to the Scriptures." And their testimony was so powerful that it made a Church and lasted until our times.

Let us not forget that Jesus Christ is *Vere Deus et Vere Homo*, truly God, and truly man.

¹Rudolf Bultman, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951) I, 124-132.

A. THE TEACHINGS OF THE HISTORICAL JESUS

Thanks to the new techniques of research in biblical studies, especially form criticism, we have today a better idea about the true person of Jesus, his original sayings and deeds. What he said and did was so commanding, so different from the acts of other prophets, rabbis or would-be messiahs, that he was recognized as the Son of God, the True Messiah of the New Covenant.

In order to find out what made him so different and powerful I will list under several headings some of the sayings by or about Jesus which, according to the majority of modern scholarship, are most likely to be authentic.

1. The Kingdom of God is at Hand

Jesus' essential concern was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. Everything else in his teaching and ministry is done according to this proclamation and takes its meaning from it.

The challenge to discipleship, the ethical teaching, the disputes about oral tradition or ceremonial law, even the pronouncement of the forgiveness of sins and the welcoming of the outcast in the name of God--all these are to be understood in the context of the Kingdom proclamation or they are not to be understood at all.²

Jesus was first and above all the Proclaimer of the Kingdom of God, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mat. 6:33).

²Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 54.

The Kingdom was imminent, as shown by Jesus' mighty deeds: "But if it is by the finger of God (Spirit of God in Mat. 12:28) that I cast out demons, then the Kingdom of God has come upon you" (Luke 11:20). When asked when the Kingdom was to come he answered: "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed . . . for behold, the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20-21).

The ἔσχατον was already partially realized, may be not as it was expected by men, but the Kingdom was near.

If the Kingdom of God was at hand and even present in the person of Jesus and in those who accepted the challenge it was still to come for those who did not accept it. In this sense we can understand the petition of the Lord's Prayer which, in fact was the disciples' prayer: "Thy Kingdom Come."

As for the final judgement and the second coming of Jesus there is no clear evidence that Jesus claimed he would return and judge or reign, there is no evidence that he claimed any title for himself. Jesus certainly thought he was preaching the truth and he may very well have said something which was close to what we find in Luke 12:8-9 "And I tell you, every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man also will acknowledge before the angels of God; but he who denies me before men will be denied before the angels of God." Scholarship, however, is divided about the original character of this saying. At any rate we may safely admit that the belief in the coming of the Son of man at the end of time was part of Jesus' Jewish tradition (Dan. 7:13-14), and, if he did not identify himself with the Son

of man he was most probably expecting his coming. We may consider Johannes Weiss' conception as plausible:

We have no direct utterances of Jesus on when and how the actualization of the Kingdom would take place . . . But we may infer indirectly that at some earlier period in his ministry Jesus believed the coming of the Kingdom closer than turned out later to be the case. Otherwise, how is one to interpret the fact that already during his lifetime he sent his disciples on a mission through the land of the Jews? But under the pressure of certain circumstances . . . the lack of repentance by the people³ he became convinced that the end had been postponed . . . things had remained pretty much as they were. The people still wandered about like sheep without a shepherd. The word of Jesus and his messengers had borne fruit only in a small number of hearts. Most of the seed had been lost immediately in indifference, thoughtlessness, and in the cares and pleasures of life.⁴

2. The Kingdom is not as Men Expect it to Be

Any preconceived ideas about the nature of the Kingdom of God can be misleading, even blinding. God's logic is not man's logic. What God does is absurd, absurd in the sense of Kierkegaard's interpretation:

I believe . . . in virtue . . . of the absurd, in virtue of the fact that with God all things are possible.⁵

This is illustrated by the parables of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Mat 20:1-16), the Two Sons (Mat 21:28-32), the Children in the Market Places (Luke 7:31-35), the Pharisee and the Tax Collector

³Matthew 11:20-24.

⁴Johannes Weiss, *Jesus' Proclamation of the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 85-86.

⁵Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1954), p. 57.

(Luke 18:9-14).

In God's view it is never too late to repent and receive forgiveness of sins; God makes no distinction between the righteous and the outcast, both are called to the joyful fellowship of his table in his Kingdom. It is better to be a humble and repentant sinner than to trust in ourselves that we are righteous and despise others. The last will be first, and the first will be last.

3. The Kingdom of God Requires Forgiveness of Sins

According to the Gospel tradition, as found in the central petition of the Lord's Prayer and in several parables, forgiveness of sins is the major aspect of Jesus' proclamation of the Kingdom. However we must consider what was meant by sinners in the Jewish conception of the time. They were a) the Jews whose faith was not strong enough and could not make penitence for their transgressions, b) most of the Gentiles, c) the Jews who made themselves so estranged from God that they were like Gentiles: thieves and tax collectors, extortioners, usurers, gamblers, swindlers, robbers, harlots, adulteresses, murderers (Mat 21:32, Luke 18:11, Mark 2:15ff.). The last category was regarded as unredeemable, even their proximity was defilement for the righteous.⁶

Jesus' proclamation of the forgiveness of sins was then of an outrageous nature for the "good" Jews. We find the most explicit of

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pp. 109-111.

his teaching on this matter in the story of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32), in the parables of the Lost Sheep (Mat 18:12-14) and the Lost Coin (Luke 15:8-10). To find the lost ones is the deep concern of God and there is much joy over one sinner who repents.

4. The Kingdom of God is a Joyful Fellowship

The consequence of forgiveness is an inner happiness made manifest in a joyful expression of fellowship, especially table fellowship. "It is fitting to make merry and be glad" (Luke 15:32), especially when one more sinner is saved. This table fellowship "with tax collectors and sinners" actually lived by Jesus as an acted proclamation was most offensive to his opponents who called him a "glutton and a drunkard" as reported after the parable of the children in the Market Places (Mat 11:16-19).

The table fellowship as lived by Jesus and his followers was an anticipation of the same joyful celebration expected in the Kingdom: "I tell you, many will come from East and West and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mat 8:11). It was a symbol of the new relationship generated by the common acceptance of the challenge of the Kingdom.

5. The Challenge of the Kingdom Requires a Response, Now

When he discovers the Kingdom, in his joy the man who finds it abandons everything else in order to keep it. This is the meaning of the parables of the Hidden Treasure (Mat 13:44, Thomas 109), the

Precious Pearl (Mat 13:45-46, Thomas 76), the Large and Good Fish (Thomas 8).

And the response must be made without delay as it is clearly expressed in the three detailed renderings of the parable of the Great Supper (Mat 22:1-14, Luke 14:16-24, Thomas 64). True, each version is written in order to carry the specific message the evangelist had in mind; but the basic tradition and meaning are the same. The analogy is between the Jews and the guests, God and the host. The Jews cannot assume that they have the right to sit at the table with the forefathers at any time they think fit according to their earthly concerns. They must respond now, when invited. If they fail to respond to Jesus' challenge they will find that others have taken their place, the "bad and good" the host's servants found in the streets, highways and hedges.

6. The Response is to Be one of Confidence, Love, Readiness

The response is first of all confidence in God, the believer must not be afraid to call on him. This is what Jesus says in the parables of the Friend at Midnight (Luke 11:5-8) and the Unjust Judge (Luke 18:1-8). These two parables try to convince by analogy from the lesser to the greater. If the importuned man has to answer his friend, how much more will God hear us? If the unjust judge has to respond the poor widow, how much more will the Righteous God listen to us?

The response also is love and mercy toward fellowmen, as God

shows love and mercy for ourselves as exemplified by the well-known story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:29-37) and the parable of the Unmerciful Servant (Mat 18:23-35). God makes no difference between races, between orthodox and non-orthodox. The most despised can be the best neighbor and consequently give the right response to the challenge of the Kingdom; the crucial aspect of human relationships is response to the needs of the most helpless. Another aspect of the right response is to forgive others as we have been forgiven.

Finally the response is readiness, earnest and wise preparation for the coming of the Kingdom. This is the meaning of the parable of the Tower Builder and the King Going to War (Luke 14:28-32), and possibly the parable of the Assassin (Thomas 98)--a parable which comes from "the stern reality of the Zealot movement."⁷ The farmer estimates the cost of the building and compares it with his resources, the king estimates his strength over against the army of his enemy, the Zealot assassin first makes trial of his strength. "Be ready" is the common lesson of these three examples.

7. The Kingdom is for Everybody

According to what we may understand from Matthew the Kingdom is for everybody, "your Father . . . makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat 5:45), it is available just for the asking (Mat 7:7-8) simply because

⁷Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), p. 196.

God the Father will not give a stone to his child (Mat 7:9-10).

But some are privileged, the *Μακάριοι*, those who are blessed because they are poor, hungry, meek, pure in heart, merciful, because they weep, because they are reviled and persecuted for righteousness' sake (Luke 6:20-23, Mat 5:3-12). Jesus came for the sinners (Mat 9:10-13). It may be that the announcement of his mission at Nazareth is an early church interpretation, it shows however a true understanding of Jesus' ministry: "preach the good news to the poor . . . proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18).

As for the rich and the self-righteous they already have their reward (Luke 6:24-26, Mat 6:2-5). The rich indeed have little hope to enter the Kingdom because it is too hard for them to renounce their earthly wealth (Mat 19:21-25), tax collectors and harlots have a better chance (Mat 21-31).

Jesus ministered to those who "labor and are heavy laden" (Mat 11:28) to the "little ones" (Mark 9:42, 10:42), the "least" (Mat 25:40, 45), the "simple ones" (Mat 11:25), in brief the disreputable and uneducated, the 'ammē hā-'ares.⁸

8. Acceptance of the Kingdom Means New Relationships

Those who give a positive response to the challenge discover a new life which is a new relationship with God and man, and a new

⁸Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, p. 112.

attitude toward the Law.

Toward God the believer is like a child who recognizes in him a loving father, or even better a "daddy" ('*Abba*). This means humility (Mat 18:1-4), absolute trust in God for meeting the daily needs (Luke 12:30, Mat 5:45, 10:29-31), absolute submission to God's will (The Lord's Prayer and Mat 7:21). This is the new interpretation of the old commandment to love God.

Toward man the commandment "love your neighbor as yourself" becomes the most important after love for God, with all the implications which this means. This means above all the service of the poor and the persecuted with whom Jesus identifies himself (Mat 25:34-40).

Toward the Law a humanistic interpretation prevails; it is necessary to be at peace with one's brother before making an offering (Mat 5:23-24), and the Sabbath is made for man and not man for the Sabbath (Mark 2:27).

9. The Disciples Have to Make a Special Commitment

Crowds followed Jesus, they were listening to him in amazement, they were subjugated by his authority, they were seeking his healing, they were marveling at his casting out demons. But they were not disciples, to follow Jesus like the crowds was not discipleship.

Prophets and rabbis had followers, respectful learners who were their disciples. These disciples first heard of the reputation of the master or knew him first, and then humbly begged for the favor of becoming his disciples. The initiative was on he who wanted to

follow. Not so with Jesus. We may recognize him as a prophet and a rabbi, to be his disciple however meant something different. First, Jesus had the initiative, he would call them; it was an imperative command, "And Jesus said to them: come, follow me" (Mark 1:17). Second, it was a call to service, "And I will make you fishers of men." Third, following Jesus meant to abandon old ties, "and straight-away they left the net and followed him." Fourth, being a disciple of Jesus did not mean that his "students" would become rabbis in their own right, "A disciple is not above his teacher . . . it is enough for the disciple to be like his teacher" (Mat 10:24). Also: "But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren" (Mat 13:8). All that Jesus' disciples can hope for is to become like him at the most, certainly not above him, and this during all their lives, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples" (John 8:31).

Discipleship required radical severance from all earthly ties. The disciples must abandon their occupation, business, fortune, "whoever of you does not renounce all that he has cannot be my disciples" (Luke 14:18-33); Peter said: "Lo, we have left everything and followed you" (Mark 10:28) and Jesus answered that all who left house, family and lands for his sake would receive a hundredfold reward and eternal life (Mark 10:29-30). Jesus also said to the rich young man: "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess, and give it to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me" (Mark 10:21).

But this is not enough, they must abandon their dearest ones, even their dead, and not look back, "If any one comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters . . . he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26). "Leave the dead to bury their own dead" (Mat 8:22), "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:59-62).

They must even renounce their own lives, "If any one comes to me and does not hate . . . even his own life, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke 14:26), "He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for my sake will find it" (Mat 10:39).

They must literally follow him, accept the fate of the wanderer, accept all privations. It is

a concrete going-together-with-someone, in which the follower, the disciple, shares in the privations and in the rejection of his Master. Whosoever wants to follow Jesus must be prepared to share his fate . . . this means to be without security and a home.⁹

With him they will find suffering and humiliation, "Are you able to drink the cup that I drank, or to be baptized with the baptism with which I am baptized?" (Mark 11:38), "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). To the man who wants to follow him wherever he goes, Jesus answers: "The foxes have holes, and the birds have nests but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head" (Mat 8:19). Because of him his

⁹Edward Schweizer, *Lordship and Discipleship* (London: S.C.M. Press, 1960), p. 17.

followers' families will be divided, his disciples will not find peace on earth, but a sword (Mat 10:34-36). Discipleship meant denial of self-interest.

10. The Social Implications of the Gospel

The teachings and deeds of Jesus as transmitted to us by the Gospel show God as a God of love and grace, as a Father who cares even for the least of his children. The social implications of this conception are tremendous. Gustavo Gutierrez expresses this in powerful terms.

The denunciation, however, is achieved by confronting a given situation with the reality which is announced: the love of the Father which calls all men in Christ and through the action of the Spirit to union among themselves and communion with him. To announce the Gospel is to proclaim that the love of God is present in the historical becoming of mankind. It is to make known that there is no human act which cannot in the last instance be defined in relation to Christ. To preach the Good News is for the Church to be a sacrament of history, to fulfill its role as community--a sign of the convocation of all men by God. It is to announce the coming of the Kingdom. The Gospel message reveals, without any evasions, what is at the root of social injustice: the rupture of the brotherhood which is based on our sonship before the Father; the Gospel reveals the fundamental alienation which lies below every other human alienation. In this way, evangelization is a powerful factor in personalization. Because of it men become aware of the profound meaning of their historical existence and live an active and recreative hope in the fulfillment of the brotherhood that they seek with all their strength.¹⁰

¹⁰Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation* (New York: Maryknoll, 1973), pp. 268-269.

B. THE EARLY CHURCH, ITS GROWTH

1. The Concept of Discipleship in the Early Church

The Early Church faithfully kept the original meaning of discipleship. She saw herself as the People of God, the Body of Christ, as the People of the ἔσχατον, as the new and true Israel. She also saw herself as the Assembly of the new disciples called by the Exalted Lord to keep and proclaim the new faith, and called to sacrifice. To be a believer was to be a disciple, and the substance of what was meant by "following Jesus" remained the same.

The suffering, temptations and distress of the disciples of the past became the model for the distress and the promise of the post-Easter believers as shown in Matthew's re-interpretation of Mark's story about the calming of the storm. Matthew gives us the new meaning of the following of Christ (Mat 8:19-26).

He has already recognized in this little boat the Church's destiny in her following of Jesus. To her too discipleship meant storm and billows, but in the midst of those her being with the Lord who is able to still the wind and the waves.¹¹

In Revelation 14:4 we find a new aspect of discipleship: "They were those who were not defiled with woman; for they are virgins. These are those who follow the Lamb wherever he goes. These were purchases from among men, to be the first fruits unto God and unto the Lamb."

Here we can understand Jesus' demand for the complete surrender

¹¹Schweizer, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

of one self as extended to chastity and even to celibacy. The concept of following Jesus is still clearly expressed. Jesus is still the one who leads the way "wherever he goes," that is through humiliation to exaltation. This call is now a calling of redemption, a new form of grace appearing in the words "these were purchased." Furthermore, the redeemed, the "purchased" share in the glory of the Lamb, "He who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I myself conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne" (Rev. 3:21). This is an interesting change because the historical Jesus did not let his disciples believe they could claim such a reward: "To sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared" (Mark 10:40).

In the Gospel according to John the call does not come directly from Jesus. John the Baptist first designates him as the Lamb of God, after which two of his own disciples follow Jesus (John 1:35-37). Here we have a new understanding of the act of separation, it is not only separation from material and family ties, but also from different ideologies. This is also the case for Nathanael who has to abandon his prejudice against Nazareth (John 1:46), and for the sheep which will not follow a stranger (John 10:5). The call itself implies more than the physical act of following, it is "Come, and see" which can be understood as "Judge by yourself and know who Jesus really is." Discipleship now means to bear witness, "we have found the Messiah" (John 1:41, 45), and the act of following becomes more idealized and philosophic: "I am the light of the world, he that follows me shall

not walk in darkness" (John 8:12).

Edward Schweizer, in *Lordship and Discipleship*, stresses that in the Epistle to the Hebrews the concept of following is still present although the word itself cannot be found. The writer of Hebrews shows Jesus as a "Pioneer" and a "Leader" to salvation through suffering.¹² In a truly Jewish fashion Jesus became the "High Priest who has passed through the Heavens" (Heb 4:14-16) as a "Forerunner" for the believers (Heb 6:20).

Consequently, for the Early Church, the essence of discipleship (that is of believing) is still to "follow" Jesus, literally or ideologically, in his way of suffering and death to glorification. This holds true for Paul too:

Paul's fellowship with the Lord is most fulfilled in the persecution which the apostle suffers. He bears about in his body the 'dying of Jesus' (II Cor 4:10). In this humiliation he is 'God's servant,' and the 'stigmata of Jesus' which he bears branded on his body are probably scars left by scourging (Gal. 6:17). His 'dying daily takes place in persecution and perils' (Rom 8:36). This . . . is perfectly in accord with the sharing of a common fate into which Jesus receives his disciples.¹³

Dietrich Bonhoeffer summed it up very aptly when he said that in the Early Church--and later, the disciple of Jesus-Christ

wander on earth and live in heaven, and although they are weak, they protect the world; they taste of peace in the midst of turmoil; they are poor, and yet they have all they want. They stand in suffering and remain in joy, they appear dead to all outward sense and lead a life of faith and devotion.¹⁴

¹²*Ibid.*, pp. 88-90.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 91.

¹⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), p. 304.

2. The People of the Early Church

The Primitive Church made no distinction between races, cultures, social standings, sexes. At the very beginning of the history of the Church we find Palestinian, Hellenistic Jews, Samaritans, Greeks and other Gentiles, Roman soldiers, Ethiopians, men, women and eunuchs, slaves, freedmen, hired laborers, craftsmen, most of them from humble origin.

On the average the community was poor. For her, this was a sign that she was chosen by God. With this conviction she was close to a type of Jewish piety which is usually labeled 'the piety of poverty.' God casts down the lofty and exalts the lowly and humble. It is a piety which is expressed in many psalms and finds its highest expression in the New Testament in the Beatitudes and in the Magnificat.¹⁵

The book of Acts tells us about a community of possessions (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32). We do not know exactly how long this general renunciation of private ownership lasted and how widespread it was. But under one form or another the Primitive and then Early Church had a special consideration for the poor, the widows and the orphans as shown by the appointment of the "seven" (Acts 6) and in many other instances, for example when Paul and Barnabas commit themselves to the collecting of money in their mission fields for the poor, especially for the poor in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25-26). We find that this concern is very important for Paul, through all his life. According to Tertullian (around 160-240 A.D.) the lowly, the sick, the needy were

¹⁵Hans Conzelmann, *History of Primitive Christianity* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), pp. 47-48.

shown special consideration. Voluntary contributions proportionate to each one's income were made

to support and bury poor people, to supply the wants of boys and girls who are destitute of means and parents, and of old people now confined to the house . . . or any who happen to be in the mines (forced labor) or banished to the islands or shut up in prison for their fidelity to God's Church . . . One in mind and soul, we don't hesitate to share our earthly goods with one another. All things are common among us except our wives.¹⁶

This supremacy of the humble will be further demonstrated in the study of the growth of the Early Church.

3. The Growth of the Early Church

In its tremendous growth the Early Church was helped by the fact that Judaism was a well spread and official religion in the Roman Empire. Christianity took over for herself the Jewish concept of one God, creator of all things and father of all men and when she substituted baptism for circumcision she had an enormous advantage. Judaism however was a hindrance too, the possibilities of Christian expansion inside Judaism were limited. The first Christian preachers were "uneducated, common men" (Acts 4:13), without rabbinic training, without professional authority. Their proclamation was an insult for the orthodox Jews: How could a crucified revolutionist become the Messiah? Worshiping him was a blasphemy (Deut 21:22ff.). Most grievous of all they declared in their earliest baptismal confession

¹⁶Quoted by Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1970), pp. 182-183.

that Jesus was Lord,¹⁷ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς, a name reserved for God in the Old Testament, were not the Christians preaching a second God? They scorned sacred institutions like the Temple and the Law. Did not Stephen say: "David found favor with God, and desired to find a tent for the God of Jacob. But Solomon built him a house. However the Most High does not live in temples made with hands . . ." (Acts 7:46ff.)? They would eat anything saying that nothing external could defile man, they abandoned circumcision, they did not respect the Sabbath. Little wonder if there were riots among the Jewish communities. Suetonius reports that Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome because they were causing too much trouble at the instigation of "Chrestus."

The young Church met many other obstacles. Christians, living according to different standards, were considered as anti-social and accused of arson (Nero), atheism, disloyalty to the state, even incest and cannibalism. They were said to hate the whole world, to disturb peace and unity in families. Their religion was considered absurd and ridiculous. They were despised for their cultural inferiority and because they belonged to the lower classes; they were the dregs of society. And which was most unbearable they would answer tortures by non-violence and love of neighbors, and in a rotten society they would live a life of purity.

Rome had fallen from the days when she was a virtuous, rustic people. In high society and in the slave community alike, we read of prostitution, idolatry, homosexuality, child exposure,

¹⁷J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, Green, 1960), pp. 14-15.

concern only for *panem et circences*, for gladiatorial shows and wild beast fights, for money and for power over others at any price . . . But Christianity . . . demanded a standard as rigorous as the highest ideals of the Stoics, and went far beyond them in making love for one's neighbor . . . the norm for behavior . . . The 'world' does love its own, and it does hate those whose standards show it up; particularly in this case when the standards of pagan society are unusually low, and those of the Church usually high, as in the first and second century they were.¹⁸

In spite of all these obstacles, in a hostile world, the Early Church burst out with the good news of the Messianic salvation and won an astonishing victory against all odds. The believer sees in this impossible success the will of God. But God works through men and we may ask ourselves who were these men and what were the channels which they used?

First, who were the people who spread the Christian faith? They were the great apostles and martyrs, men like Peter, Stephen, Paul, Philip, Barnabas. They were also wandering missionaries and prophets sent out and supported by the local churches like the prophets mentioned in the Didache. It was a full-time ministry totally devoted to the service of the Lord. It was ascetism too; they would often refuse to accept the bare necessities of life. As soon as they had made a few converts in one place they would appoint local leaders and go to another place. Together with these itinerant preachers the settled ministers (presbyters) would also preach day after day and built up their communities.

They were also ordinary lay people, men and women like those

¹⁸Green, pp. 46-47.

evicted from Jerusalem under the persecution which followed the martyrdom of Stephen and who carried the Gospel with them. They were most of the time just friends and neighbors to potential proselytes and would talk and talk again about their faith wherever they could meet people, as reported by Origen.¹⁹

The chief agents in the expansion of Christianity appear not to have been those who made it a profession or made it a major part of their occupation, but men and women who carried on their livelihood in some secular manner and spoke of their faith to those they met in this natural fashion.²⁰

The Christian faith would enter into families, including upper class families through converted wives, slaves, even children. Women were especially devoted and effective. In Acts alone we find Dorcas, Lydia, Priscilla, the four daughters of Philip, the women of Borea and Thessalonica. Paul in his greetings in Romans 16 gives the name of eight women. They gave many great martyrs like Blandina, Eulalia, Perpetua and many others as listed in the *Golden Legend*.²¹ Christianity was above all, from the very beginning a lay movement.

In contrast to our present times, when Christianity is highly intellectualized and led by a professional clergy, when it is mostly the privilege of the middle and upper classes, early Christianity (like early Methodism) was spontaneously preached by lay evangelists and was mostly appealing to the humblest people.

They were evangelizing not only by words but also by deeds.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

²¹ Jacques De Voragine, *La Legende Doree* (Paris: Club Francais du Livre, 1956).

They made the word visible, they preached by way of example. Their lives were consistent with the faith they professed. In the New Testament as well as in the second century literature there is a strong emphasis on the necessary consistency between holiness of life and outward mission. They brought their testimony up to the point of martyrdom, the highest test of their sincerity. This is the key of the success of the early church, and of early Methodism as well.

There is no doubt at all that Christianity has survived and been sustained through the centuries by a quality of life most visible to others in martyrdom and service: This was so in the time of persecution: 'the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church.' It has also been true in the classic tales of the great conversions. Augustine's, Wesley's . . . In each case it was the sight of Christian lives in martyrdom and service to others, that prepared the way for the Spirit's converting action. In all the great epochs of missionary outreach, it was the church of the martyrs of Christ and the servants of man that actually communicated the Gospel.²²

Second, what are the channels which were used by the early church, what was the methodology of her expansion? They used every possible means which were available in their times. They used public and formal preaching in synagogues for the Jews, open air preaching as reported in Acts in many instances: Jerusalem, Samaria, Lystra, Athens. They would prophesy or speak in tongues although Paul emphasized the supremacy of prophecy over speaking in tongues for edification purposes (I Cor 14). They would teach, teaching was just an aspect of evangelism; they opened schools of Christianity like Origen's school at Alexandria. Originally this school was created to teach

²²Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), pp. 100-101.

Christian faith, morals and philosophy, but soon it became an evangelistic agency as well as a didactic one. Expelled from Alexandria, Origen started a new one in Caesarea, for him teaching was the most effective form of ministry.²³ There were many instances of such schools, the oldest one we know of being that of Justin in Rome. Great Christians like Justin, Plotinus, Origen, Clement and many others were evangelists and teachers, preachers and missionaries and very often martyrs. All these activities were just different aspects of the one great activity of the early church: evangelism.

Besides formal and public preaching or teaching home evangelism was a powerful means of propagation of the faith. The most effective proselytizing was done in private houses. In Acts and Paul's letters we find many examples of such meetings: the house of the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem, Jason's house at Thessalonica, Titius Justus's at Corinth, Philip's at Caesarea, Lydia's and the Jailer's at Philippi, Stephanus' at Corinth. The house, the household, was the basic cell of the Jewish and of the Greco-Roman society as well. Christian missionaries were always eager to gain as many houses as they could, houses which would serve as beacons of the faith lighting the neighborhood. Meetings in private houses were held for many purposes, from Acts alone we may quote prayer meetings (12:12), Christian fellowship (21:17), Lord's Supper Celebration (2:46) nights of prayer, worship

²³ Jean Danielou and Henri Marrou, *Des Origines à Grégoire le Grand* (Paris: Seuil, 1963), I, 189-198, 215-221.

and instruction (20:7), evangelistic meetings (16:32), proclamation of the gospel (10:22), formal instruction (5:42); Paul in Rome used his hired house to invite Jews for a full day of conversation and discussion (28:17-18). He made a systematic use of home evangelism "I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and teaching you in public and from house to house . . . " (20:20). This technique was successfully used by the non-conformist theologian and pastor Richard Baxter (1615-1691) who found that house-evangelism was more fruitful than any other method. He systematically gathered his parishioners twice a week for a whole day

taking about fifteen or sixteen families in a week that we may go through the parish, in which we are upwards of eight hundred families, in the year. I cannot say that one family has refused to come to me . . . And I find more upward signs of success with most that do come than from all my public preaching to them.²⁴

The natural complement of home evangelism was personal testimony, sharing one's faith in private encounters, or by visiting friends, neighbors and relatives. This was an important feature of the expansion of the primitive and early church. The apostles used every opportunity for evangelism: Peter and John talked about their faith with a beggar near the Temple, Paul after a shipwreck talked to the leader of the island about Jesus Christ. We have no means to measure the influence of such personal testimony but there is little doubt that it was a determinant factor for the growth of Christianity.

²⁴Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor*, quoted by Green, pp. 218-219.

To complete this inventory of the methods used by the early church we must also mention the written word or literary evangelism: the many gospels, epistles, creeds, apologies, catechisms which flourished as early as the first century and expanded in a way we cannot imagine.

The literary disposition that began to pervade Greek Christianity in the earlier years of the second century swelled to a flood in the last third of that century and reached proportions that amaze the modern reader. The volume, variety and vigor of this literature must be realized if we are to understand what manner of faith it was that was beginning to turn the Greco-Roman world upside down, for not the least of the elements of its strength was the intellectual attack it was making upon paganism.²⁵

These are the people and the ways by whom and by which the Spirit conquered the world. At the heart of this growth was a tremendous driving force, the compulsion for the believer to spread the message of Jesus, his love for all mankind, especially for the poor, the lowly, the oppressed, his concern for the salvation of the unevangelized. When we know the good news brought by our Lord, when we know the hope and grace he revealed, we can but share our treasure in love with others.

Before proceeding any further it will be useful to sum up the great lessons we can learn and retain from Jesus' teachings and from the success of the early church

- Jesus' message was for everyone, but especially for the poor, the outcast, the slaves and women.
- This call was a call to love, service, non-violence, to faith in and obedience to God, to repentance and purity.

²⁵Edgar J. Goodspeed, *A History of Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942), p. 5.

- This message was a message of present and eschatological forgiveness and salvation.
- Early Christians saw themselves in the disciples, they accepted the disciples' commitment.
- Christianity was above all a lay movement; but all Christians saw it as their absolute duty to spread the good news: simple believers, ordinary people, but also the clergy, the philosophers and doctors of the church, all of them being ready to submit their faith to the ultimate test of martyrdom.
- Early Christians shared goods and generously supported the needy.
- Early Christians backed up their faith and teachings by the quality and the purity of their lives; they made the word visible.
- The Early Church was a teaching or evangelistic Church, there was no difference between evangelism, prophesying, preaching and teaching. In all evangelistic activities there was a deep sense of the seriousness of the issues involved.
- Early Christians used all forms of evangelism which were available at their times, especially home evangelism, literary evangelism and schools of Christianity.
- Although their message was Christocentric ('Jesus is Lord') they did not make any radical difference between the historical Jesus and the exalted Lord. They regarded the words and deeds of Jesus as so crucial to their proclamation that they used the pericopes and apophtegms which have been isolated today by form criticism.

Evangelism was the very life blood of the Early Christians

and so we find that 'day by day the Lord added to their number those whom he was saving.' It could happen again if the Church were prepared to pay the price.²⁶

²⁶Green, p. 280.

CHAPTER 4

BIBLICAL GUIDELINES FOR OUR CURRENT NEEDS

The similarity of the features between the early church and early Methodism is striking indeed. Now we can better understand what John Wesley meant when he said "Methodism, so called, is the old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the primitive Church."²⁷

Of course, it is impossible to transfer to our times without adaptation the lessons of the past. However some crucial aspects of its teachings are perennial. They will form the bedrock of our solutions because suffering and sin are of all ages, and because men are fundamentally the same through the centuries. All we need is a little sense of observation, some common sense and imagination. The formula I propose for our times is "Social Christianity."

A. SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY IS NOT A POLITICAL SYSTEM

In fact, to say "Social Christianity" is redundant. Christianity is revolutionary and social in essence, by definition. When I say revolutionary, I refer to the original meaning *revolutio*, a movement which returns to the same point, to the origin. When I say social, I mean *socialis*, that is what refers or appertains to society,

²⁷Outler, p. 34. See above, p. 49.

and more specifically to human society, mankind, as a whole. Christianity thus understood is a religion always coming back to the original truth for the good of mankind. Consequently the word "Christianity" is sufficient in itself to carry the meaning I intend to give it. However I use the expression "Social Christianity" to distinguish it from today's Christianity which is mostly "Nominal Christianity."

It follows that Social Christianity is not a political system, nor a political party like Socialist Christianity or Christian Socialism in England or Germany or the "Mouvement Republicain Populaire" in France. Social Christianity is not even the "Social Gospel" as it was understood at the beginning of this century although some of the methods used at that time may appear as its logical consequences. The Social Gospel Movement was seeking social reforms as such, it tried to transform the economic life, it advocated mainly social action. Its spiritual founder, Shailer Matthews said:

Jesus thus makes prominent social rather than metaphysical goals. Neither the state nor society, abstract goodness nor duty, but a more personal because a more social individual, is the end of the quest for perfection . . . But a theology has to be touched with social passion if it is to become a basis controlling social action . . . If one does not believe that Jesus actually is setting forth a . . . healthy social principle, his christology will be no more potent in social reorganization today than it was in the fifth century.²⁸

Social Christianity is simply Christianity rooted in the teachings of Jesus and of the early church. Like early Methodism its

²⁸Shailer Matthews, *Jesus on Social Institutions* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), pp. 152-154.

action is social because it is aimed at the minds and hearts of men simply because it is Christian. Social Christianity is of all ages because it is biblical and human, because it is founded on the durable and basic principles of the Jewish-Christian tradition. Social Christianity is not concerned only with the political or with social or economical systems as such. Social Christianity follows Jesus: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be yours as well" (Mat 6:33), "Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Mark 12:17).

The American Protestant finds civil protection of two great spiritual rights of man: the right to place the sovereignty of God above every other sovereignty, and the right to stand fully within the state as subject to it and yet the right to stand above it and view it as under judgement just as he himself and his Christian community are.²⁹

Social Christianity takes human institutions as they are. If they are good or bad it is because their worth is that of the men who made and operate them. Bad men will make good institutions bad, and good men will better bad institutions. When institutions need to be changed Social Christianity does not aim at destroying them by violence. Rather, its policy is to invade them by the technique of *noyautage*, to change them from inside, and simultaneously to arouse awareness and a desire for change in public opinion and in the existing structures by convincing or converting opinion leaders and the intervening elite. Social Christianity attacks evil where it is, that is in man and in the consequences of his acts.

²⁹Lewis Joseph Sherrill, *The Gift of Power* (New York: Macmillan, 1955), p. 82.

Although he was a revolutionist in spirit Jesus was not a revolutionary, however he was condemned and crucified as such by the Romans. He had certainly several characteristics in common with the Zealots.

- He proclaimed that the Kingdom of God was near,
- he was critical of the kings (Luke 22:25) and especially of Herod, 'that fox' (Luke 13:32),
- he had Zealots among his disciples: Simon the Zealot, and most probably Peter 'Barjona' and Judas Iscariot.

However he was a determined opponent to resistance and violence as shown by:

- his sayings on non-violence (Mat 5:39f.) and his command not to draw sword although it seemed that he almost succumbed to the temptation of armed resistance at Gethsemane,
- his command to love one's enemies and the Beatitudes about the peacemakers,
- his respect for the law, although he gave it a new significance,
- his friendship with tax-collectors, one of them becoming his disciple,
- his opposition to Zealotism and temporal power as a diabolic temptation,
- his entering in Jerusalem on an ass which is of a peaceful character as opposed to the entry on a horse like a warrior or a conqueror.

If he showed anger and some violence in the cleansing of the Temple it was not a Zealotist act. It was either an act of indignation or a sign like those used by the great prophets, a way to announce the destruction of the Temple. If Jesus' attitude toward worldly institutions was complex due to his eschatologic hope he was not concerned by them.

Since he is convinced that they will perish with this world, he limits himself to proclaiming their transitionness, and on the other hand to cleansing what is possible without a violent destruction of their existence. He does not waste his time in participating in any venture which has as its goal the destruction of institutions by the force of arms . . . The cleansing

of the Temple is an individual act . . . done to guide our attention to the authentic worship in spirit, which will be realized outside the framework of worldly institutions.³⁰

Jesus was seeking individual conversion, conversion of the heart, which would bring justice and happiness among men. His compassion for the poor and the oppressed was in true conformity with the teachings of the Old Testament. In the Jewish sacred book we find scores of statements in favor of the poor, against the rich and the powerful, for social justice and better institutions. This is not surprising if we consider that, among other things, the Old Testament is also the story of a nomadic people who wanted their share of the land, of oppressed slaves seeking freedom. The prophets uttered severe judgements against the rich and it was a time, not so long ago, when a preacher quoting Amos in the pulpit would be accused of communism.³¹ Almost any social reform can be justified by some quotation from the Old Testament; let us mention at random:

- fair collective work agreement (I Kings 12:1-16),
- condemnation of the rich and their punishment (Amos 6:4-11),
- condemnation of unfair practice (Amos 8:4-6),
- condemnation of social injustice (Is 10:1-46),
- condemnation of intemperance and luxury (Is 5:11-17),
- duties of the rulers (Micah 3:1-3, 9-11),
- religious duty (Micah 6:6-8),
- condemnation of the exploitation of the people by the rulers (Jer 22:13-19),

to say nothing of the profound social character of the Deuteronomic Code, in consideration of the customs of the time (Deut 15, 24:14ff., 26:12ff., 27:19).

³⁰Oscar Cullmann, *Jesus and the Revolutionaries* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), pp. 19-20.

³¹From a statement made by K. Morgan Edwards in his class "Preaching in the Wesleyan Tradition," School of Theology at Claremont, Fall 1973. (Quoted by permission.)

Jesus summed up these social principles in the second great commandment coming right after the commandment to love God: "Love your neighbor as yourself," even "your enemies." And to make this commandment still more explicit he added:

Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world, for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me (Mat 25:34-36).

As a result of the preceding considerations the guidelines of Social Christianity are few in number, clear and simple.

- Seek first the Kingdom of God.
- Love God with all your heart, all your soul and all your mind.
- Love your neighbor as yourself, even your enemies.
- Do to men what you would them do to you, be servant of all.
- Work for the salvation of mankind and preach the Gospel by words and deeds.
- Live a life of purity, consistent with your faith.
- Be a peacemaker, condemn violence, seek the conversion of the hearts and minds of men.
- Give first priority to the needs of the poor and the oppressed.
- Accept humiliation and suffering for Jesus Christ's sake.

Social Christianity is nothing else than what Methodism used to be: "Christianity in Earnest" and "Social Holiness."³²

B. MEETING THE CURRENT NEEDS

Are not we privileged? The needs of our present times are by far greater than they were in the time of Jesus and the early church, and in the time of John Wesley. With the reduction of distances and

³²*The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), Historical Statement, p. 8.

the increase of population each Christian has now three billion neighbors to be concerned with. An immense task lies ahead of us. The whole world is really our parish, our field of action, to exercise the three great activities in which early Methodism was so successful: Social Christianity, Evangelism and Missions, Ecumenism. However, according to the limited topic of this dissertation I will consider only social service and action (a form of evangelism anyway) which is the heart of the Methodist tradition, and I will limit the geographical area to the United States of America and the western world.

1. The Time of Monsters Has Come

As we have already noted, Bishop Berkeley commenting on the collapse of morality and religion in England said, in 1736, "The age of monsters is not far off."³³ Today this is realized, we are in the age of monsters. One of its manifestations was the adoption of racism as a philosophy and a way of life which gave birth to the Ku Klux Klan and their lynchings (W. W. Sweet makes a strong connection between the rise of fundamentalism and the simultaneous rise of groups like the K.K.K.),³⁴ with the extermination camps and torture as a daily diet in Nazi Germany. I have already mentioned the spreading of pitiless exploitation of man by man and of homosexual sadism.³⁵ Satan is

³³See above, page 8.

³⁴William Warren Sweet, *The Story of Religion in America* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), pp. 406-407.

³⁵See above, pages 40-42.

stronger than ever.

Many people would be revolted by the so-called churches which openly worship Satan. The most widely publicized establishment of this kind is the First Church of Satan in San Francisco, headed by Anton LaVey, the High Priest who declared: 'The Satanic Age started in 1966 when God was proclaimed dead, when the Sexual Freedom League came into prominence and the hippies developed as a free sex culture . . .' Satanic cults are expanding in the United States, especially in California, in Berkeley, Big Sur, Venice, San Francisco, San Diego; the number of Satanist circles gathering in Los Angeles County is indeterminate.³⁶

Hal Lindsey interviewed Commander Bob Vernon of the Los Angeles police force who declared:

We have found evidence of animals, mostly dogs, who have been skinned alive and all blood drained from them. We discovered through talking with some of the cult members that the blood is put into caldrons, mixed with LSD, and then used as a drink during their rites or ceremonies.

There are also evidence of human sacrifices and ritual cannibalism:

A highway patrolman apprehended a man who was said to have killed another man and eaten his heart. When the officer searched him, he found knuckles of a human in the suspect's pocket. He was part of a Satanic cult.³⁷

Almost every nominal Christian to a considerable extent serves Satan today. In order to serve Satan it is not necessary to be a witch or a sorcerer, or to belong to a Satanist cult. It is enough to do nothing, to say nothing. When we remain passive in the face of evil, when we don't proclaim our faith, we serve Satan. It is most interesting and informative to quote Bob Vernon once more. When asked

³⁶ Hal Lindsey, *Satan is Alive and Well on Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1972), pp. 20-21.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

"Do you have an explanation for the trend toward witchcraft, Satanism, and some of those other bizarre cults?" he answered:

For one thing, I know there is a spiritual hunger among people today. Many of them have gone to a Church and have not found the answer to that hunger. Someone comes along and offers them a feeling of belonging, a sense of being loved by a group, and they fall for it. There are other reasons of course, but longing for acceptance and a place in the world is what I see as being a very important part of the insane direction many are taking into the supernatural.³⁸

And yet, as Hal Lindsey says, Commander Vernon is a no-nonsense man. He reports it as he sees it.

2. Need for Spiritual Life

There are so many evidences of this spiritual hunger with the rise of the Jesus Movements, Oriental cults, witchcraft, occultism, Satanist cults, that the evangelistic task of the Church seems easier than ever. The increase of spiritual hunger was foretold some thirty years ago by a group of scientists, economists and philosophers meeting in Paris. They said that with the development of technology and the correlative increase of leisure more people would turn to philosophy and religion to find an answer to their metaphysical anxiety. This time came in the mid-sixties and the Church was not ready. But it is not too late and Christianity has today a tremendous opportunity, a greater opportunity than ever, to spread her message of love and salvation.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

3. Need for Acceptance and a Feeling of Belonging

With the destruction of the vital and basic cell of society, that is the family, with the extreme fluidity of the population moving restlessly to places where they think they can find a higher income or a better life, people have lost their roots and the traditional frame of their existence. They became isolated individuals, divorcees, abandoned wives (or husbands), abandoned or runaway children, human wrecks, unwanted strangers in a hostile world. There are tens of millions of them, easy victims to swindlers, drug pushers, pimps and homosexuals, cults of all kinds. They are starving for love and acceptance, ready to open themselves to a smile and a warm welcome.

4. Need for Identity

Search for identity is the great problem of adolescence as Erik H. Erikson³⁹ and Ross Snyder⁴⁰ have pointed out. This search is a very complex process which Paul B. Irwin⁴¹ has analyzed as the search for

- a sense of affirmed existence,
- a sense of self recognition,
- a sense of self at-homeness,

³⁹Erik H. Erikson, *Youth: Change and Challenge* (New York: Basic Books, 1963), and Erik H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968).

⁴⁰Ross Snyder, *Young People and their Culture* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969).

⁴¹Paul B. Irwin, for his class "Youth Ministry," School of Theology at Claremont, Summer 1972.

- a sense of identification with one's communities,
- a sense of particularity,
- a sense of worth,
- a sense of personal power,
- a sense of orientation and devotion,
- a sense of objectivity (especially about one's limitations),
- a sense of awareness and social concern,
- a sense of destiny.

To help a youth through this crisis requires special skills and understanding which are best found in the Christian community.

The problem is still more complicated for the lower-class teenager. His life-style is different from what we know, it is conditioned by a lower-class ethos made of several main core concepts:

- trouble, a preoccupation with the adversities and the complications of life,
- toughness, a value encouraging fearless, defiant, and bravado acts that usually are meant to uphold an image of masculinity,
- smartness, the esteemed ability to outfox, 'take' and 'con' others,
- excitement, the search for a variety of experience and expression to break the monotony of an otherwise deprived life style,
- fate, as belief in destiny reflecting the feeling of powerlessness,
- anti-intellectualism, a negative attitude toward abstractness and formal learning,
- authoritarianism, the tendency to interpret social interaction in vertical dimensions.

Early acquisition of these core sentiments tends to prepare these youth to become a failure in situations requiring competition with middle-class peers or in general situations that confront them with middle-class demands.⁴²

Our educational establishment, white middle-class in nature and methods, has failed in its task of educating the lower-class

⁴²Hans Sebald, *Adolescence, A Sociological Analysis* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1968).

youngster as evidenced, for example, by the number of school drop-outs in the Mexican-American community (70% in Southern California) and by the difference in median grades in elementary school: Mexican-Americans: 7.1, Blacks: 9.1, Anglos: 12.1.⁴³ And yet, it is a well-known fact that, in normal conditions, bilingual children do better than monolinguals in school.

This is an instance where the Church could bring a most needed complement to the official education, especially by using the proven method of Paulo Freire.⁴⁴

But adolescents are not the only ones who need help in finding their identity, homosexuals for example stopped somewhere on their way to complete maturity, and many an "adult" needs to really know himself to find inner peace and happiness.

So long as man's self-knowledge is clouded by distortions of his self-understanding it is not true self-knowledge, hence his knowledge of God and his relationship with God will be distorted . . . A man must know himself if he is to know God; and a man must know God if he is to know himself.⁴⁵

5. Needs of the Ethnic Minorities and of the Immigrants

Faithful to her humanistic and generous tradition this country keeps her doors open to people of all races and nationalities. This

⁴³Figures given by Elias Galvan in his class "The Church's Ministry to the Hispanics," School of Theology at Claremont, Summer 1973.

⁴⁴Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Seabury Press, 1973).

⁴⁵Sherrill, pp. 16-17.

must be stressed before we embark in a criticism which is only a relative criticism, a criticism aimed at better solutions. Not many nations did what the U.S.A. did for the foreigner, especially the refugee. Some of the natives and of the pre-established settlers have been assimilated, most of the immigrants have been absorbed in the melting-pot; but many ethnic groups are still segregated, the most important being the Blacks, the Hispanics (mostly Mexicans and Mexican-Americans), the Indians, a total of some forty million people.

The Blacks are the strongest minority and are on their way to official recognition. They have their own churches and colleges, strong leaders, people of the caliber of Martin Luther King. However much is still left to be done, especially in the fields of general acceptance, education, training and equal opportunity. As for the Indians, the Hispanics, and the other ethnic minorities almost everything is still to be done.

Minority people are especially stricken by unemployment. In the latest figures issued by the Department of Labor about employment we find⁴⁶

White	76,442,000 workers
Nonwhite	9,335,000 workers
Total employed	85,777,000

If the ratio ethnic minorities to total population, that is about 20%, were applied to the total work force it would mean some

⁴⁶"After A Spectacular Rise in Jobs--Trouble Coming," *U. S. News and World Report*, Nov. 26, 1973, p. 101.

17,000,000 jobs for the nonwhite instead of 9,335,000.

Immigration is taking a bigger share in the United States population growth as shown by the following figures released by the Immigration and Naturalization Service.⁴⁷

<u>Period</u>	<u>Annual Average Number of Immigrants</u>
1931-40	52,843
1941-50	103,504
1951-60	251,548
1961-70	332,168
1971-73	385,075
Year 1973 alone	400,000 ⁺

Impact on Population Growth

1950's	10.6%	or 1 in every 9 additional Americans
1960's	15.6%	or 1 in every 6 additional Americans
1973	19.8%	or 1 in every 5 additional Americans

For a denomination which used to minister to the immigrants (cf. language missions to immigrants and German language conferences, p. 22 of this dissertation) it is interesting to note the shift in the countries of origin of the newcomers:⁴⁸

	<u>1965</u>		<u>1973</u>
1 - Canada	38,327	1 - Mexico	70,141
2 - Mexico	37,969	2 - Philippines	30,799
3 - United Kingdom	27,358	3 - Cuba	24,147

⁴⁷"Now, A Growing Surge of Immigrants From Asia," *U.S. News and World Report*, Nov. 26, 1973, p. 94.

⁴⁸*Ibid.*, p. 95.

	<u>1965</u>		<u>1973</u>
4 - Germany	24,045	4 - Korea	22,930
5 - Cuba	19,760	5 - Italy	22,151
6 - Colombia	10,885	6 - China & Taiwan	17,297
7 - Italy	10,821	7 - Dominican Republic	13,921
8 - Dominican Republic	9,504	8 - India	13,124
.			
14 - China & Taiwan	4,057		

Shift by Great Geographic Areas

	<u>1965</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>Change</u>
Northern Europe & Canada	111,645	33,499	Down 70%
Asia	20,683	124,160	Up 500%
Latin America	81,781	99,407	Up 22%

Consequently for the Southern California Conference whose territory is open to Asia and Mexico (in addition to the already settled Mexican-Americans) there is a clear indication that it should seek to minister to (1) the Mexican-Americans and Mexican immigrants, and (2) the people from Asia and Indo-Asia, in addition to a ministry to the Blacks, the Indians and other neglected ethnic groups.

In this ministry the fight against illiteracy and the lack of skills should be stressed. A human being cannot be fully mature and independent if he is not educated and has no craftsmanship.

6. Needs of the "Non-Respectable"

The self-righteous-nominal-Christian does not mix with certain people, even if they belong to the same middle-class. Some people are

just not welcome to Church and they perceive it quickly. They are for instance the alcoholics, the gamblers, the drug addicts, the single, especially the single parents. In order to do what the church neglected to do two great specialized organizations developed to meet the need of these people: P.W.P. (Parents Without Partners) and A.A. (Alcoholics Anonymous).

Much has been said about these two remarkable organizations and there is no need for a long description in this dissertation. It is unfortunate that the church missed such great opportunities to help people in need. However, having learned their lesson the churches in Las Vegas initiated "Gamblers Anonymous." In Southern California a similar ministry could be open for the horse-race bettors, "Bettors Anonymous."

As for the drug addicts almost all the initiative is left to the official services of the cities, counties and states, and the stress is on the repressive aspect. There is also a technical and medical aspect which requires special skills. In most cases the Church could act as a preventive agency, or a helping and supportive agency in the curative process.

7. Needs of the Destitute

In the most affluent country of the world, where 6% of the world population enjoy 40% of the world production it is hard to believe that millions are destitute, most of them being of course part of the ethnic minorities. Nobody should starve, and yet millions

do starve.

Older people are victims of inflation (an average rate of 6% for the past 5 years). The fixed retirement income they carefully planned with the "help" of the insurance companies and savings and loan associations (when they did) dwindles year after year in buying power. The situation worsens with the increase of longevity. According to the latest actuarial tables today's life expectancy is

16 years (men) and 21 years (women) at age 65,

5 years (men) and 8 years (women) at age 81.

As a result 78 out of 100 Americans aged 65 and over have incomes under \$4,000 a year (Bureau of Census); 2,100,000 Americans aged 65 and over are on Welfare (Department of Health, Education and Welfare).

Officially, only 6 million people are unemployed; but how many jobless do not meet the requirements for unemployment benefits? How many are not on welfare who have no resource of any kind? There is still an immense task for charitable institutions.

8. Needs of the Rich

The rich too can be saved if they consider themselves as stewards of God's property and give what they do not really need. The curse against the rich as found in the Old Testament and in Jesus' teaching will not be held against them if they abandon their selfishness, instinct of possessiveness, and hardness of heart.

But who dares tell them in the upper-class churches? And how shall we reach the majority which do not go to church anyway? Almost

everything is to be done in this kind of ministry which could yield immense resources for the destitute.

9. Needs of the Workers

The concept which was at the origin of the worker-priests movement was a sound one: consider the national territory as a mission field, go to the people, live the same life as they live in order to better reach them, and evangelize by testimony, by way of example. I had very close friends in the "Mission de France" when it started in 1945, I even spent a few days in their special seminary in Lisieux, and I followed them through their ministry. The movement failed for lack of structure, cohesion, and guidance. For many of them their faith was not at the level of their commitment and they succumbed to Marxist propaganda when they found themselves isolated among the working class.

However, the concept spread and was taken over by several denominations. Today there are Methodist minister-workers in England and, in Southern California some twenty Episcopalians. Since February 1973 I have tried this formula, I work at night with National Can Corporation, as a watchman, in Vernon and Etiwanda, always introducing myself as a minister-worker. As they were building a new plant I have been in contact with two types of workers, the construction workmen and the industrial workmen. I have made the following observations: Almost all of those to whom I talked said they believed in God but very few go to Church. Some talked to me about personal problems. But the possibilities of contact on the job are very limited. The

only time is the break for a meal. Before clock time they stay in their cars and listen to the radio. After work they dash to their cars to drive back home. The closest place of living to work which I have found is three miles and it can be as far as sixty-five miles for the construction workmen. I do not think that the worker-priest formula can be very effective when people live so far away from their jobs. It might work in more concentrated areas or in business with at least one hour interruption for a meal, like offices and commercial centers. The best way to reach the working class, at least in Southern California, seems to live where they live, not to work with them. This suggests a specialized local church program; the home church formula and the residential ministry should be more effective.

10. Needs of the Atheists

Most atheists are to be found among the intellectuals such as technicians, artists, teachers, etc. The way education is given in our society does not encourage reflection and meditation. For the average intellectual it takes a great knowledge and complete maturity to rediscover God.

Intellectuals have been repelled by archaic dogmas and by the narrow-mindedness and ignorance of the literalists. Very little has been done to reach them, to explain to them how to read and understand the Bible, and the deep human value of the Christian message. The texts of the Old Testament have been compiled, re-written, and edited many times. Almost each early Christian community had its own Gospel.

In the same manner the Old Testament should be presented to our generation according to the knowledge of our time, and a new gospel should be written.

To evangelize is to tell the gospel in terms which can be understood by the hearer, but without altering its meaning. As the evangel was made for each early community so one gospel must be made for modern man.

11. The Immense Task of Modern Evangelism

I repeat: Are not we privileged? The task awaiting the Christians has never been so great, the neglected needs have never been so numerous and so diversified. An unexplored field is wide open to us, and so huge that the prospect gives a feeling of dizziness. Let us try to evaluate in numerical importance the most crying needs of this country alone.

Ethnic Minorities, Immigrants	40,000,000
Unemployed, not in the above category	4,000,000
Destitute, not in the above categories	6,000,000
Older people, not in the above categories	20,000,000
Runaway children	1,000,000
Divorcees	15,000,000
Homosexuals	<u>3,000,000</u>
Total	89,000,000

To this amount should be added the delinquents, the drug addicts, the gamblers who are not already included in the listed categories.

What does this mean?

It means that every Christian should take in charge, in this country, financially or spiritually, or both, at least two persons.

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, 'The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few, pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest' (Mat 9:37-38).

PART III

HOW TO MAKE METHODISM AGAIN

A CHURCH IN EXPANSION

The well known statement "Preach until you have faith, and when you have faith preach" could be interpreted "Serve and evangelize until you have faith, and when you have faith serve and evangelize." We need to practice Christian service to rekindle and maintain our faith; faith without service weakens. Consequently since it seems that our faith has decreased to the point that Methodism lost its impetus, let us try to start all over again as if we had the faith and the commitment of the early Methodists. Let us revitalize the three great values which made Methodism famous as a revolutionary church, an evangelical and missionary church, and an ecumenical church. For this purpose the church will need a more adequate government, a policy with vision, institutional tools and methods. In conformity with the limited topic of this dissertation I will consider only what could be done to make Methodism again a revolutionary and social movement.

CHAPTER 5

MAKING METHODISM AGAIN A REVOLUTIONARY CHURCH

Early Methodism was successful, as early Christianity, because it was Social Christianity. Social Christianity as defined in Chapter 4, section (A) of this dissertation is the essence of both. Thus, the remedy to the present decline of Methodism seems obvious: go back to, and apply the fundamental and perennial principles of Social Christianity in order to meet our current needs.

A. CORRELATION BETWEEN THE EARLY CHURCH, EARLY METHODISM, AND TODAY'S METHODISM

Since we found many similarities between the growth and success of the early church and those of early Methodism let us establish a correlation table in order to underscore our present weaknesses and strengths. Our weaknesses will be shown by (w) and our strengths by (st).

Out of eleven elements of comparison between early Christianity and early Methodism on one side, and today's Methodism on the other side we find only one which is on the positive side for our present church: an already well settled church which can offer a strong support for evangelism and Christian service.

Another factor is both a weakness and a strength: the lack of general hostility does not fortify the faith, does not help

DIAGRAM IV

CORRELATION BETWEEN

<u>EARLY CHURCH</u>	<u>EARLY METHODISM</u>	<u>TODAY'S METHODISM</u>
Original message of repentance, grace and salvation	'The old religion, the religion of the Bible, the religion of the Primitive Church'	Cheap grace, no repentance, little use of the Bible (w)
Mission to the poor and the outcast	Mission to the poor and the outcast	Mission mostly to the white middle class (w)
General hostility against Christians	General hostility against Methodists	Well accepted church with status and prestige (w)(st)
Strong spiritual leadership	Strong spiritual leadership	Little spiritual leadership (w)
Lay movement	Lay movement	Very little involvement of the laity (w)
Close community and fellowship	Close community and fellowship	No real Christian community (w)
Itinerant apostles and prophets	Itinerant preachers and circuit riders	Only settled clergy (w)
Comprehensive evangelism (convert, nurture, mature)	Comprehensive evangelism (convert, nurture, mature)	No real evangelism but 'membership drives' (w)
Hardship and martyrdom	Hardship and martyrdom	Comfortable Christianity (w)
Lack of support from Judaism	Lack of support from the Anglican Church	Already settled church--possibility for strong support (st)
No buildings, mobility and flexibility	Very few buildings, mobility and flexibility	Worship and activities confined to buildings (w)

mobilize energies; on the other hand it can give acceptance to a renewal of Social Christianity under the protection of an established church.

To sum it up here are our weak points compared with the factors of success of early Christianity and early Methodism:

- A doctrine of cheap grace, requiring no repentance or amendment; little use of the Bible and of the teachings of Jesus,
- Mission mostly to the white middle-class, very little service to the poor and the outcast,
- No strong spiritual leadership,
- No real Christian community,
- Only settled clergy having more the character of professional executives than prophetic evangelists,
- No real evangelism (convert, nurture, mature); but only 'membership drives,'
- Comfortable Christianity which leads not to the acceptance of suffering and martyrdom for the sake of Jesus Christ,
- Worship and activities confined to the existing buildings.

These may help define the future policy of the United Methodist Church as an instrument of Social Christianity.

Perhaps, the most striking common feature of the early church and early Methodism might be that both were minorities. It is a well established fact of observation that the orientation of the future is given by isolated, determined, men or active minorities. Harvey J. Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. remind us of this truth.

If the church is to contribute anything at all to the shaping of the future, it must at some points live as a minority in the present. The greatest tragedy for the church is not opposition from external sources, but rather the apostasy of millions of its own members who look to the church to confirm culture, provide serenity, and protect tradition--plus the fact that thousands of clergymen are willing to be the caretakers of such peaceful graveyards.¹

¹Harvey J. Seifert and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., *Personal Growth and Social Change* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1969), pp. 181-182.

B. CONTEMPORARY ATTEMPTS OF SOCIAL CHRISTIANITY

Several attempts have been made in recent years by some denominations, including the Methodist church, to bring Christianity back to its true mission. Some of these attempts have been successful and they may give us a few cues at more general and systematic solutions. I will distinguish between the psycho-spiritual field, and the politico-economic field.

1. The Psycho-Spiritual Field

This is a domain where the church--because it was more suitable to her traditional mission and ability, was most successful in the recent past, especially the Protestant Church in the U.S.A.

Pastoral counseling, this modern form of confession rejuvenated by psychotherapy, is recognized, used, and developed in all major denominations. An association of pastoral counselors² has been created to set standards for training in pastoral counseling and to certify clergymen engaged in specialized counseling ministries. In addition a special association³ organizes and controls pastoral education and training in more than one hundred and fifty centers in hospitals, penal and correctional institutions, juvenile treatment centers, parishes and inner-city ministries, etc. In the Chicago Theological

²American Association of Pastoral Counselors, Inc., 31 West 10th Street, New York, New York.

³Association for Clinical Pastoral Education, Inc., 475 Riverside Drive, New York, New York.

Seminary the "Logos Institute" founded by professors Philip A. Anderson and Arthur L. Foster in 1971 seeks to explore "the relation of religion with efforts to actualize human potentiality" and to develop meaning, healing and growing for individuals. The Logos Institute also offers experiential training in house church leadership. In passing it is rather surprising to note that they designate the house church a "new social invention,"⁴ not even giving credits for this to Paul, Acts, the early church, Baxter and John Wesley. It is a typical feature of our times that ignorance (or lack of intellectual honesty) leads to the discovery of many "new inventions."

Home evangelism and the house-church are certainly excellent ways to spread the gospel and to nurture contemporary Christians, to revitalize the faith in large congregations and to initiate new churches. A successful experiment of a house church in Rochester, New York State is reported by C. Loren Graham in the article "Ekklesia" in *The Church Creative*.⁵

Each Sunday morning at about nine o'clock, a little church that might be called a big family meets in a house or in a room provided by a divinity school. No one watches the clock, for time seems unimportant. Everyone waits for the nature of the service to unfold because each Sunday service is likely to be new and unique. The emphasis is on originality and relevance. Everyone will take part, and there will be a spirit of acceptance of everyone, young or old. Any visitor will be treated as one of the group (p. 61).

. . . It is the intention that each member will be 'on mission' --that is, he will be engaged in some volunteer activities in which he will attempt to carry the spirit of Christ into the world (p. 65).

⁴C. T. S. President's Newsletter, last Quarter of 1972.

⁵*The Church Creative* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), pp. 61-71.

As a result of this spirit of service they engage in many activities such as sponsorship of parolees and youthful offenders, tutoring children behind in school work, assisting in the training of crippled children, case aid work in the city slums, etc. As they have no building to maintain or pay for and very few other expenses the money they give for the poor is really available for the poor. They give scholarships to young refugees and Blacks. They have even bought a house, to rent it at a low price to a Black family with fourteen children.

A very effective way to help distressed persons to find their psychological and spiritual balance, to find their identity, to find acceptance, meaning and an opportunity for spiritual growth was the classes and bands of early Methodism which have been recently rediscovered in our western world⁶ under the name of small groups dynamics, and which can be used again by the Church as "redeeming," "therapeutic," "growth," "healing" groups of people meeting together to incarnate a "body of Christ." In a small group communications establish themselves easily and lead to honest self-revelation and entrance into other persons' intimacy. Relationships with people and God can be restored and bring release from sin. Small groups however present a danger. They may close themselves to newcomers, stop the generative process of mitosis, and become isolated cells nurturing only to their members, developing group selfishness, and a feeling of self-righteousness

⁶and long ago in the Communist countries, see above, page 20.

and superiority. In redemptive small groups the imperatives of sincerity, humility and openness to the outer world must be recalled best in an opening prayer, at each meeting.

More missionary in spirit and methods are the city missions which can be helped by such institutions as C.O.M.M.I.T.--the "Centers of Metropolitan Mission In-Service Training" (Los Angeles), the Night Ministry (San Francisco), the Strip Ministry (Las Vegas), the High-Rise Apartments Ministry (New York City, Milwaukee), Inner-City Churches (Savannah), Coffeehouses (Atlanta), the Marketplace Ministry (Alexandrine, Va). The key to successful evangelism and service is to go out where the people are; if they do not go to Church, let the Church go to them and meet their needs. In Southern California a few attempts have been made in this sense under the coordination of M.U.M., "Metropolitan Urban Mission." Among these are the Toberman Settlement House (San Pedro), the Plaza Community Center (East Los Angeles), the Watts Community Ministries, etc. Many of these are remarkable and effective attempts of Christian service; but all suffer from lack of strong financial support.

A most successful and famous attempt to revitalize Christianity simultaneously in the spiritual, social and economic domains in the post-World War II era is the Protestant (and now ecumenical and international) "Communauté de Taizé" in Burgundy. Even though they gave freely help and service to all around them, without proselytizing it took ten years for five religious men to be accepted by the local population which is either atheist or Roman Catholic. Finally through

evangelism by way of example they grew in number and succeeded in the service of Christ and men. Today, thousands go to see them every year for spiritual guidance and for learning Christian service from their inspiring experience. They proved, once more, that a fruitful spiritual life is best found when faith is associated with love for others, discipline, commitment, humility, perseverance, and fortitude.

Among the largest enterprises of service to the poor, the crippled, the sick, there are several great Christian institutions. The Salvation Army is probably the one Methodist-originated religious institution which is the most faithful to the vocation and spirit of early Methodism. Other service agencies related to various religious groups include Goodwill Industries, the twenty-two hospitals of the Masonic Shrine where crippled children are treated free of charge, Dr. Schweitzer's Hospital at Lambarané, the "Little Sisters of the Poor" founded by Saint Vincent de Paul, the Emmaus Companions of the Abbé Pierre, and many more hospitals, counseling centers, drug centers, mission outposts, etc. . .

A most encouraging sign in our times is the appearance of many forms of Christian service initiated by local congregations: ministry to senior citizens in various ways (transportation, visitation, "adoption" of nursing homes, meals on wheels . . .) and to young mothers, sponsoring of homeless alcoholics, employment agencies for disadvantaged minorities, telephone information service for transient people, telephone counseling service with "trouble teams" in radio-cars as initiated by Alan Walker with the Life-Line Center in Sydney,

Australia, and developed in the U.S.A. by "Contact Teleministry"; lay committees on grief therapy, pastoral care teams, half-way houses for persons on probation, youth counseling ministry like "Our House" in Claremont. The most encouraging feature about these many forms of ministry is that a majority of them were launched and/or operated by lay men and women--nominal Christians becoming "altogether Christians!" Will "A member of the United Methodist Church is to be a Servant of Christ on mission in the local and worldwide community" (Discipline, par. 113) come true?

2. The Politico-Economic Field

Church involvement in politics is a controversial issue. I have already explained⁷ that, according to Jesus' teachings and to the example of John Wesley Social Christianity simply takes the institutions as they are and seeks to change them, if necessary, through the conversion of human hearts, without use of or encouragement to violence. However it is certainly the absolute duty of the Church to denounce immorality, oppression, etc. wherever they are, and to make frontal attacks through all morally permissible means of expression.

Where the Marxists control the trade-unions in the free world the Church tried the creation of Christian workers unions but they were never powerful enough to have a strong and lasting influence. Their policy consisted merely in going beyond the Marxists demands in asking more without making creative suggestions. They never had an

⁷See above, page 80.

original and constructive policy capable of attracting and retaining the workers. It is the same with the youth movements--workers, farm laborers, students; their number and their action never were a serious threat to their Marxist counterparts.

Christian ethicists and some church leaders advocated the public or common ownership of the key factors of production, but Christian economists seldom did. Their theories always remained within the boundaries of capitalism and liberalism, of free competition limited only by vague self-imposed moral rules. Their most daring stands were the cooperatives of production and consumption, the participation of the workers in the profits, the right to strike and the right to collective bargaining. Their doctrines and programs were felt as aiming at the preservation of the *statu quo ante*, and never appealed to the workers in Europe. In the U.S.A. however their principles found a successful and commendable application in the form of profit-sharing plans, stock options and stock purchase plans, company retirement plans. Here we have private capitalism at its best.

An excellent example of Church intervention in the socio-economic field, without any attempt toward proselytism, and done in a purely Christian spirit, is the work of the "Interfaith Commission on Labor Relations" at Torrington, Connecticut, as reported by Raymond C. Phibbis in *The Church Creative*.⁸ Unfortunately ministers are not prepared for this kind of action and a precious time was wasted, which

⁸*The Church Creative*, pp. 29-42.

caused longer suffering to the families of the workers on strike:

The only honest thing that can be said about the Commission in the next two years is that we dawdled and doodled along under the excuse of becoming more knowledgeable. We did not become more knowledgeable; we simply wasted valuable time. By fooling around, we contributed our share to the conditions that precipitated the bitter and costly seventeen week strike of 1963-64 in Torrington's largest industry (p. 35).

Finally they appealed to the School of Business Administration and its Labor Education Center of the University of Connecticut; clergymen, business professors, employers and employees were brought together. The opponents learned to know each other better and came to terms.

Person-to-person communication was stressed as of number one importance. Especially was the value of this seen in interpreting contract contents. The group was unanimous in agreeing that the non-economic factors were as important as the economic factors. Personal relationships, human values, and dignity were of greatest importance . . . Finally . . . they are to one another no longer 'labor leaders' or 'management men' but Bill and Grace, and Tom and Russ, and Bennie and Auge (pp. 40-41).

As a result, with the settlement of the conflict they decided to maintain permanent relationships to discuss their common problems.

Raymond C. Phibbis concludes his story:

This bit of conversation . . . will indicate what is beginning to happen in labor-management relations . . . : The labor leader told the personnel manager of his deep concern about the 5,500 industrial workers who have to commute to work in other communities. This personnel manager replied: 'That surprises me for . . . we have always thought that you union leaders were all for people going out of town to reduce the local work force and thus enhance your bargaining position.' The labor leader replied: 'No. Everyone who goes out of town (is a close relative) to one of our union people . . . and we know that the most dangerous place in the world is on the highway. They are not something to bargain about. They're people.' The manager replied softly, 'Yeah. We never looked at it that way.'

If I have given some importance to this example it is because it

perfectly illustrates what I mean by Social Christianity taking the institutions as they are and aiming first at converting human hearts.⁹ But this is not to ignore many other instances of effective Christian initiative in the politico-economic field such as the Interchurch World Movement and the steel strike, the Church Peace Movement, the Civil Rights Movement.

C. GIVING METHODISM THE NECESSARY TOOLS FOR ITS MISSION

The necessity of a change, of a *revolutio* is deeply felt by many in the Church; some have expressed their convictions very strongly, like Albert C. Outler:

One thing we have heard from John Wesley, or could have, is that evangelism for him was a life-long martyrdom, an ungrudging out-pouring of self in service, in Christ's name and spirit . . . It was this visible martyrdom and servanthood that rammed home the *evangelion* he preached. He taught his Methodists to be martyrs and servants--in just precisely those terms.¹⁰

The world hears the gospel when it sees it, when its witnesses are clearly concerned with human existence and clearly committed to a more fully human future, in this world and in the next . . . To the starving we must help them find bread. For the well-to-do, we must help find a way out of affluence's cruel traps. To the oppressed, we must help them find moral commitments that are anchored in God and have some promise of saving power.¹¹

Michael Green has similarly called all Christians to do their due share of God's work on earth:

⁹See above, page 83.

¹⁰Albert C. Outler, *Evangelism in the Wesleyan Spirit* (Nashville: Tidings, 1971), p. 103.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 104.

Unless there is a transformation of contemporary church life so that once again the task of evangelism is something which is seen as incumbent on every baptized Christian, and is backed up by a quality of living which outshines the best that unbelief can muster, we are unlikely to make much headway through techniques of evangelism. Men will not believe that Christians have good news to share until they find that bishops and bakers, university professors and housewives, bus drivers and street corner preachers are all alike keen to pass it on, however different their methods may be. And men will continue to believe that the Church is an introverted society composed of 'respectable' people and bent on its own preservation until they see in church groupings and individual Christians the caring, the joy, the fellowship, the self-sacrifice and the openness which marked the early Church at its best.¹²

As we have just seen several attempts have been made by local congregations to live a more Christian life in the service of others, but unless a common, organized will to bring changes is made manifest and creative through modern and adequate structures, through a policy with a vision, and through a general mobilization of the faithful in the church, nothing great, nothing fruitful and lasting will be done. The necessity of organization and method (Are not we "Methodists" after all?) has been stressed by Harvey J. Seifert and by Howard J. Clinebell, Jr.

In complex and resistant situations, change must be planned. If things are let alone in laissez-faire fashion, they usually will not work themselves out. We have witnessed the collapse of the theory of automatic adjustment in society, either in the form of social atomism and anarchy, or in the form of the unassisted operation of natural laws. Now we realize that personal and social conditions must be studied and diagnosed, goals projected for both personal actualization and social progress, and resources mobilized.¹³

¹²J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (London: Longman, Green, 1960), p. 275.

¹³Seifert and Clinebell, p. 11.

Suggestions for modern and adequate structures for a policy with a vision, cannot be made and developed within the framework of this dissertation. I will concentrate on the mobilization of the faithful in the church which will be designed according to the key principle of what church action should be: RE-CHRISTIANIZATION in view to come back to Social Christianity, which is simply true Christianity.

1. The Goals of Re-Christianization

To re-Christianize the church means to fill her again with the Spirit which animated Jesus, the early church, and early Methodism. Of course this is not to say that we decide that the Spirit will come back, but that we have to prepare ourselves for his coming back, and earnestly call for it, and pray God for it.

It means that the Church has to consider again herself as an instrument of social Christianity, to teach and propagate the gospel and the true teachings of Jesus and of the early church,¹⁴ and to use and adapt to our times the factors and methods which made the early church and early Methodism so successful.

It means that every Christian worthy of this name must consider himself as a missionary and a servant, and preach the good news of Jesus-Christ by words and deeds.

It means that we stress and concentrate on Jesus' second great

¹⁴See above, pages 53 to 83.

commandment "Love your neighbor as yourself," even your enemies, and "do to men what you want them to do to you." After the love for God, this is the golden rule which could bring the Kingdom to this world if men would deserve it. It contains everything. It is a commandment of equality and fraternity, a commandment to respect human dignity and others' opinions in a true "catholic spirit." It is the absolute condemnation of the exploitation of man by man, of any form of monopoly, of the abuse of power, of wild and unfair competition, of all the abuses of misunderstood freedom, of all forms of racism and segregation, of political, judicial, social, economic and cultural injustice, of the spirit of acquisitiveness, of luxurious and idle living, of the accumulation of superfluous goods, of the devastation and misuse of mankind's common property: land, water, air.

"Love your neighbor as your self" is the only, necessary and sufficient basis for a Christian social creed. Of the current United Methodist Social Creed it has been said that it "moves from the banal to the ridiculous . . . is the credo of American middle class liberalism . . . is a kind of lowest common denominator of current social concern . . . expressed the comfortable radicalism of the well-to-do."¹⁵ Without being so radical we may recognize that a creed should be made of a few lasting and simple articles of beliefs or principles. Thus the "Social Principles" which cover fourteen pages of the Discipline, and our Social Creed miss the mark. A distinction should be made

¹⁵From the *Methodist Reporter*, quoted in "Polarity Reported Lessened Among British Methodists," *Newscope*, July 13, 1973, p. 3.

between a few real principles (fundamental rules, from *principium* = origin, beginning) and their application to specific concerns, most of them only relevant to the four-year period preceding the last General Conference. Principles should be perennial, their application temporal and sometimes temporary. If principles are scattered and lost in several pages giving some of their possible consequences and applications there is a danger that they might be forgotten.

Above all, to re-Christianize the Church means that we stop selling cheap grace, which is a poor recruiting policy anyway as demonstrated by our decline and the success of the most radical denominations.¹⁶

Cheap grace is the deadly enemy of our Church . . .
 Cheap grace means grace sold on the market like cheapjack's wares
 Cheap grace means grace as a doctrine, a principle, a system . . .
 Cheap grace means the justification of sins without the justification of the sinner . . .
 Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without Church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession.
 Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus-Christ living and incarnate . . .
 We are fighting today for costly grace . . .
 Such grace is costly because it calls us to follow, and it is grace because it costs a man his life, and it is grace because it gives a man the only true life. It is costly because it condemns sin, and grace because it costs God the life of his Son . . . Costly grace is the Incarnation of God.¹⁷

However re-Christianization does not mean to return to fundamental beliefs and rigid dogmas. Our theology and creed must appeal

¹⁶See above, page 29.

¹⁷Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 45-48.

to everybody, intellectual and uneducated, to modern man in general. It is enough to believe in and preach "God, loving Father of all men, related to us by the Spirit; Jesus Christ, God incarnate, our Redeemer" (Rom 4:24-25 and Acts 4:11-12); his passion, death and exaltation, and his teachings such as the need for repentance and the life of love.

Let us not forget that in the Early Church, in order to be baptized and to be admitted as a member it was enough to believe in God and to confess "Jesus is the Lord." Yet, based on only these two fundamental beliefs the faith of the early Christians made thousands of martyrs and built up the church.

2. Abandon One Great Prejudice

In her condemnation of monasticism the Protestant Church assumed that all religious orders were only self-oriented gatherings of cloistered mystics. In fact, the spearhead of Roman Catholicism was made of such active and "in-the-world" orders as the Knights of Malta and Templar, the Franciscans, the Jesuits, the Little Sisters of Saint Vincent de Paul and many others. Only a few religious orders were entirely mystical and cloistered. They gave Roman Catholicism its best missionaries, evangelists, theologians, scholars, social workers, its best propagandists. It was the great mistake of Protestantism to deprive itself, for instance, of such a great institutional tool as the Jesuits.

Protestantism, and more specifically Methodism whose theology

is liberal and closer to the reality of our present time, should seek the possession of such a tool in order to mobilize its most devoted men and women--possibly ten to twenty thousand of them in the United Methodist Church, and use their talents and willingness to serve more effectively. Taizé grew up as an independent body, free from all denominational ties and its members have to take the traditional vows of obedience, poverty and celibacy. I don't think this is the most adequate model; for all its fame and spiritual influence Taizé still does not count more than fifty members (men), and less than that for its related order of women. More flexibility is to be sought in order to attract everyone who is available--single persons and couples, for a temporary or a lifetime commitment. Also, a greater flexibility may be theologically superior.

The most adequate model would probably be a new creation, more relevant to our times and more able to respond to the urgency of the many and diversified current needs. Also constitutional and administrative rigidity should be avoided to allow instant adaptation to new circumstances and different needs. The solution should bring together some of the best features of the old Templars (spiritual and active life), the Jesuits (knowledge and involvement in secular life), early Methodism (ministry to the poor, small group techniques), and also the modern methods of such social institutions as V.I.S.T.A., the Peace and Teachers Corps, the French Corporation Service. This would give a secular--or mostly secular order in which volunteer ministers and lay persons would be united together by a strong Christian spirit, a

willingness to bear witness to Christ up to the point of suffering should circumstances require, an unquestionable integrity, an ardent desire to grow spiritually and to serve mankind, a minimal set of rules and a freely accepted discipline. The name of this order, in conformity with the Methodist Discipline (paragraph 113) and what I said in the introduction of Chapter I, Part 2¹⁸ would be "The Servants of Jesus Christ on Mission"--S.J.C.M., or more simply, S.J.C.

¹⁸See above, page 53.

CHAPTER 6

THE SERVANTS OF JESUS CHRIST ON MISSION, A METHODIST ORDER

In this chapter I will give the guiding principles of what might be the purpose, theology, methodology, constitution, rule and ritual of the S.J.C.

A. PURPOSE

The purpose of this order would be to propagate the Christian faith by words and deeds, by making the Word audible and visible in a way which makes it most appealing to men; to serve others especially the most neglected, distressed, oppressed or helpless. In the spiritual domain it would be to nurture and mature its members; to convert, nurture and mature new disciples of Jesus-Christ. It would be an institutional tool at the service of the United Methodist Church.

B. THEOLOGY

The theology of the S. J. C. would be a modern theology understandable by all:

--*God*, a universal and eternal Spirit, supreme intelligence and power, creator of all things, generator of life and evolution, whose essential characteristic is love; once manifested to men through Jesus; now related to us by the Spirit, and always ready to listen

to our prayers.

--*Man*, end product of evolution, who, at a certain stage of his own evolution was given the Spirit and made a spiritual being as well as a physical one, and thus is of a mixed nature; who, through his disobedience and pride, became estranged from God; who was shown anew the way to final salvation by Jesus, God incarnate, through repentance, faith, obedience, and love for God and fellowmen; this way is freely open to all who believe in Jesus Christ, as a gift of God's grace and mercy.

--*Jesus*, bearer of the Spirit, God incarnate, teacher of the way to final salvation, redeemer of man for his past sins (justification); who through his death and renunciation of earthly power showed us what kind of Kingdom is to be sought here and after death; who was exalted and became our spiritual Lord.

--*Life eternal* in the fellowship of God, Jesus-Christ and all saints for the spirits of those who are saved, that is for those who attain to final perfection.

The S.J.C. would be taught to understand other Christian beliefs or opinions and to accept them in others, or even for themselves if they so desire, in a true "Catholic Spirit."¹⁹

When asked about such fine points as which comes first, faith

¹⁹ John Wesley, *Forty-Four Sermons* (London: Epworth Press, 1944), p. 442.

or repentance, or the sex of the angels, the S.J.C. would simply answer "I don't know, this is too subtle for me, I just leave it to God," and come back to the service of fellowmen.

C. METHODOLOGY

The methodology of the order, of its action, would be guided by the following principles in view of the highest degree of efficiency.

--*Unity* of formation, of spiritual authority, of discipline, materialized and maintained by the observance of a minimal set of common rules, regular retreats and devotional practices, by a liaison bulletin and periodical reports to the coordinator of the order.

--*Diversity* of action and talents to meet the most urgent needs of the Church, and of the people to whom she ministers.

--*Totality*. The three aspects of evangelism, κήρυγμα, κοινωνία, and διακονία would be always integrated and used simultaneously in the order's missions to "proclaim, live, demonstrate the *shalom*."²⁰

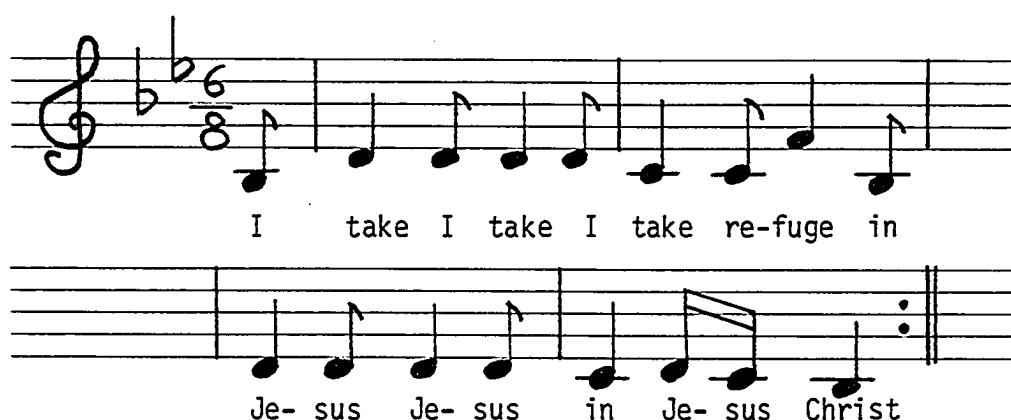
--*Flexibility*. In a world where Christianity is becoming a smaller minority, where it is oppressed in some countries²¹ the

²⁰J. C. Hoekendijk, *The Church Inside Out* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), p. 25.

²¹Richard Wurmbrand, *Tortured for Christ* (Glendale, CA: Diane Books, 1967), and Brother Andrew, *God's Smuggler* (Old Tappan, N.J.):

strategy of the *maquis* and underground networks would be most effective. This will hold true for the evangelization of people in new suburban areas and in older urban areas where there is a shift of population, the technique of the home church and class meetings is part of this strategy. Tasks and methods--some of which could be inspired by those I reviewed in Part II, Chapter 1, Section B, would be adapted to the circumstances and to the most urgent needs of the time and of the place. For example the methods of pastoral counseling and group therapy would be encouraged, as well as depth studies, social witness, and vital worship.

In another domain, if it is the fashion of the time to go in the streets and chant a mantra why not do the same the Christian way and instead of *Hare Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare!* chant²²



Revell, 1967).

²²An old processional chant, words my own, music written with the help of Jim Tyler, music director, El Monte First United Methodist Church.

--Knowledge. To be more effective, members of the Order would be given a strong basis of religious instruction, they would have the duty to keep up to date and well informed in their secular jobs, in their local and national communities, in their Christian missions and functions, in their methods. In order to gain the intellectuals and modern man in general the theology of the Order should be expounded, and a new presentation of Scripture would be made in agreement with the knowledge of our time.

--Vocational Leadership. Lay volunteers and minister-workers in the order would be encouraged to choose professions or jobs in which they would be most influential and/or helpful to others: physicians, nurses, professors and teachers, counselors, lawyers, social workers, psychiatrists, corrective institution employees, union leaders, industrial and construction foremen, Peace Corps and V.I.S.T.A. workers, etc. In their private and public life they would have to gain the confidence and esteem of their family, relatives and friends, fellow-workers, employers, employees, subordinates, superiors, clients, students, colleagues. They would be encouraged to be among the best and most reliable in their jobs or professions, to become opinion leaders and members of the intervening elite.

--Presence. And that would be part of their ministry, a ministry of presence, of witnessing, always ready to help, to bring peace, to care, to show compassion and understanding, to be available when needed. The S.J.C. would not "be ashamed of the Gospel"; as a

visible sign of their commitment and availability they would always carry the cross of the order on their person, their cars, the doors of their homes or their front yards.

--*Acceptance* of others as they are, without judging them even if evil in them is to be condemned. Tolerance, of course, would be a form of acceptance.

--*Expectation*. Acceptance of others as they are would not exclude the hope that one day they would become as God wants them to be. The Servants of Jesus-Christ would sow the seed, pray God, and leave it to Him for its germination at the appropriate time, without trying to impose, or interpose themselves.

D. CONSTITUTION

1. Members

The order would be open to all persons above eighteen who feel called to Christian discipleship and active service. A married couple would be considered as one unit. The first contract would be for six months only, renewable up to two years, after which contracts would be for two years. After ten years of consecutive service, and not before age thirty-five anyway, members could be admitted to lifetime contract and final vows. The first two years at least would be a noviciate mainly devoted to religious instruction, devotional training and service apprenticeship.

Ministers in the order would carry the same duties they now

have in all the functions of the Church. Besides they could be minister-workers or resident ministers. Their noviciate could be shorter and they could be admitted to full membership as early as six months after their initial admission provided they give evidence of the instruction requirements which would be the common basis for all members.

2. Organization, Administration

The order would be mainly a spiritual body and its organization and administration would be kept to a minimum. Members working by teams of two to twelve would be placed under the authority of parish pastors, chaplains, specialized ministers, district superintendents, bishops, missionaries. They would be self-supportive or paid by the Church inasmuch as they perform regular Church functions. They would be under the spiritual leadership of parish (according to size), city or area, district, conference, national and world coordinators assisted at each level by a Board of Servants. Normally the order would not own property and its offices, classes, retreats, conclaves, meetings, ceremonies, etc. would make use of existing facilities. Only at a later stage and for the common life of older members retired from active service could a Common House be bought or built, preferably with the own financial resources of the members. This Common House could have a school for novices, a library and a printing shop. All funds collected by or given to the Order would be used for the service of the needy, only a small percentage could be

diverted for administration and instruction.

3. End of Membership

End of membership would come normally at the termination of the contract or by voluntary withdrawal or dismissal for disciplinary reasons after a regular judicial procedure before a court of discipline.

E. THE RULE

The Rule of an order is the necessary cement and safeguard which keeps it together and assures that it will last in view of the fulfillment of its purpose. Early Methodism had its general rules²³ which we have forgotten; they could profitably be brought up to date. Augustine some time after the creation of the first community of clerics in Hippo wrote the *Prooeptum* although he started with an oral discipline as testified by his Sermon 356 delivered to them at the Epiphany of 426:

Many of you know the kind of life we lead; however, in order to remind you of it, someone will read for you the passage from the Acts of the Apostles in which is described the rule (*forma*) for the life that we want to accomplish. I want you to listen carefully to this reading, so that, with God's help, I may make you understand what I want to tell you.²⁴

The passage to which Augustine referred, and which was read was:

²³The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church, 1972 (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing House, 1973), pp. 66-68.

²⁴Translated from Luc Verheijen, *La Regle de Saint Augustin* (Paris: Etudes Augustiniennes, 1967), II, 172.

And when they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with holiness.

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. And with great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold, and laid it at the apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need (Acts 4:31-35).

Consequently this passage would be the source of all religious rules.

In passing it is interesting to note that the oldest rule we know, the *Ordo Monasterii*, was probably not written by Augustine (except for the introduction and conclusion) but by his friend Alypius for the community of Thagaste; then Augustine would have written his *Prooeptum*.²⁵

Here I will just give a few guidelines of what the rule of the S.J.C. could be.

1. Vows

To do the work of God among men is a serious undertaking and everyone seeking admission in the Order should take temporary vows for the duration of the first contract and renew them at each new contract:

a. Humility, instead of poverty. Poverty in itself is not a virtue and can even destroy the personality when the point of starvation is reached. What is important is indifference to wealth, and freedom from the spirit of acquisitiveness. Humility is a rare virtue,

²⁵ *Ibid.*

the opposite of pride which was emphasized as a sin by Isaiah; for him sin is haughtiness, arrogance and pretension and the Day of Yahweh will be the time of destruction of all that is lifted high (Isa 2:12, 17). Jesus took over the concept and said "Blessed are the meek" (Mat 5:5). For many of our contemporaries to take a vow of humility will be a difficult step, it will be a necessary step however to enter the Order.

For us humility is seldom a virtue. That it could be espoused as a basic spiritual orientation requires an act of imagination on our part that runs against our cultural grain. But in most cultures the time comes when humility can be understood.²⁶

Humility is the necessary virtue which will allow us to reach and understand the destitute, the oppressed, the suffering. Saint Vincent de Paul used to recommend to the Sisters of Charity: "When you help others do it in such a way that they will forgive you for your helping them." Humility would imply that members, if not necessarily poor, would keep for themselves and family only a sufficient income and give up what is superfluous for the relief of the poor. This requirement would come in addition to normal tithing for the Church.

b. Purity, instead of celibacy, would imply chastity as a goal for single persons, and a state as close as possible to chastity for married couples without endangering their marital love. Centuries of religious practice have demonstrated that chastity greatly facilitates spiritual life.

²⁶Norman K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), p. 334.

What comes out of a man is what defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication . . . adultery, coveting . . . licentiousness, . . . All these evil things come from within, and they defile a man (Mark 8:20-23).

Under the vow of Purity homosexuals would be welcome in the Order with the hope that they would find complete maturity and internal peace.

c. Service, instead of obedience, but which is more comprehensive and includes: service to God, service to the church, service to mankind, service to each other. The practical consequence of the vow of service would be that each member engaged in a secular occupation would give at least five hours a week of Christian service to the church, especially to the needy. As for those who would not have to work for a living or who would not be in charge of a family, they would have to give at least forty hours. This time of service would not include the time for daily devotion and for education received.

d. Final Vows. Because vows involve the whole personality, body, mind, and soul they become part of and shape a person's identity.

On the psychological level the 'election' of a vocation is a kind of definitive discovery of personal identity. All of the factors of one's past and of his present self-awareness are seen to find their coherence in the commitment of oneself to a certain permanent life-form. At this privileged moment a man can say: 'This is myself. Here I find my own true identity. All that is to follow in my life, my personal history, will find its significance and its value within this identity.' Such a commitment is, consequently, an engagement for life to this vocation and all its known and unforeseen consequences, because to deny it is to deny one's own painfully acquired personal identity. The understanding of the vocation will constantly

grow through living it, and the realization of the depth of commitment will become ever clearer as its consequences are faced; but it is grounded in this moment of free election of self-identity.²⁷

This is why the S.J.C. would start their service with temporary vows and would not be able to take final vows before age thirty-five, when full maturity is attained, and when they know without any doubt that all their lives belong to God and are to be employed only according to His will. Jesus himself did not start his ministry before age thirty and John Wesley started his field preaching mission at age thirty-six.

2. Noviciate

During a period of at least two years (which could be reduced to six months for ministers meeting the education requirements) members would be considered as novices and take the courses (possibly by correspondence) of a School of Christian Service together with practical training in devotion and service. The basic instruction would include the following: the equivalent of 4 semester-credits in the Life and Teachings of Jesus, 4 in the whole of the New Testament in relation with the Old Testament, 4 in Wesleyan studies and Methodism History, 4 in Science and Theology, 4 in the techniques of prayer and devotional life, 4 in Christian Ethics, 4 in Social Service, 4 in Group Leadership, 4 in Speech, Communication or Preaching, 4 in

²⁷John Carroll Futrell, *Making an Apostolic Community of Love* (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1970), pp. 179-180.

Pastoral Counseling, 8 in special skills useful for their ministry (music, singing, education, first-aid, drama, team sports coaching, sewing, cooking, home economics, vegetable gardening, house and appliances maintenance and repairs, small machine-tools work etc.). That is a total of 48 semester-credits. Christian Service cannot be cheap. The noviciate would also be a period of evaluation of the moral and religious standards and of the commitment of the candidate.

3. Spiritual Life

Every day a total of at least one hour would be devoted to prayer, meditation, Bible reading or inspirational reading. Whenever possible these exercises would be done in groups and would include morning, noon, and evening prayers. Grace would be said before every meal. Before sleep a review of the day should be made and thanks given to God with, if necessary, confession and request for forgiveness. Each team would meet once a week for mutual confession and exhortation and for a worship service. Each month they would meet for a fellowship meal with celebration of the Lord's Supper. Twice a year, at the time of the renewal of vows and contracts they would meet for a weekend retreat, and every year, or every two years according to circumstances, they would meet for a week convent.

4. Servanthood

Christian Service would be the *raison d'être* of the Order, according to the vows of each member. First priority would be given

to the poor and the oppressed with the gathering of financial resources and the mobilization of free professional assistance for their relief. Education would be emphasized especially in the ethnic minorities. Evangelism by words and deeds should always be in mind. For this aspect of their activities the S.J.C. would receive directions from the church authorities (pastors, district superintendents, bishops, etc.) for whom they would work.

Servanthood means to serve Jesus-Christ in others, to see him in everybody as Benedict said in his Rule, and especially the poor (R. 53), the sick (R. 36), according to Jesus' teachings. He drew the great conclusion of this principle when he said that his monks should "honor all men."²⁸

Servanthood means to be always active in the service of God and men and to pray: *Ora et Labora*, "Pray and Work." Pray him to stay close to him and to better understand what he wants us to do when we do his work among men and for men. Servanthood means never to be idle, a practice John Wesley strongly recommended to his preachers. This spirit we still find in the questions asked the candidates to membership in full connection in the Methodist annual conferences:

5 - Are you resolved to devote yourself wholly to God and his work?

14 - Will you diligently instruct the children in every place?

17 - Are you determined to employ all your time in the work of God?

²⁸Claude J. Nesny, *Saint Benoit et la Vie Monastique* (Paris: Editions de Seuil, 1959), pp. 34, 42.

19 - Will you observe the following directions?

a) Be diligent. Never be unemployed. Never be triflingly employed. Never trifle away time; neither spend any more time at any place than is strictly necessary.

b) Be punctual. Do everything exactly at the time . . .²⁹

Finally servanthood means to be ready to serve God up to the point of ultimate witnessing if required of us, that is martyrdom. Of course no one knows if he will be capable of this ultimate form of courage--the mind is willing but the body is weak. This possibility, however, should be accepted in spirit.

5. Community

Not until their final vows and lifetime engagement would members live a common life with community of resources. This would be first for single persons. Couples would be required to enter the community only after their children are fully educated and independent. At any rate common life could be postponed after age 35 by continuing on a two-year contract basis until members are absolutely certain of their vocation. Temporary communities could be organized when necessary and appropriate if members so desire.

F. THE RITUAL

A ritual and a liturgic calendar are most important for the spiritual cohesion of a religious community. They give members a

²⁹*The Book of Discipline* . . . 1972, article 334.

sense of unity, of belonging, of a special relation to God and to each other. They can be a powerful means of proselytism and attract new vocations.³⁰

1. Admission

Special and meaningful ceremonies publicly held in churches would mark the initial admission to the noviciate, the admission to full membership, the admission to lifetime membership. These ceremonies would be inspired by the practices of the early church and the rites of the great religious orders.

2. Fellowship Meals

Fellowship meals "with Jesus" would be the specific and ordinary worship ceremonies of the order. Guests could be invited provided they are baptized. These meals would be at the same time as regular fellowship meals, devotional practice, worship service with communion. According to circumstances they would take the form of an early Jewish Christian celebration when no minister is available for the consecration of the elements, and, when a minister is available, of a Pauline or Johannine celebration.

3. Worship Service

When members of the order would meet together for their retreats

³⁰I have already drafted most of the ceremonies to be included in such a ritual. But it would be too much material to include in, or to annex to this dissertation.

or annual convents they would observe a worship service with a specific liturgy characteristic of the spirit and purpose of the order.

4. Special Observances

There would be four special observances, one for the creation of the order; one in commemoration of the first open air preaching by John Wesley which was also the final step in his conversion, the preaching at Bristol, on April 2, 1739; one in commemoration of the first Covenant Service as instituted by John Wesley and held in the French Church at Spitalfields on August 11, 1755; and one in commemoration of the creation of the first Methodist Society, in London, in December 1739.

5. The Creed of the S.J.C.

At least once a week, in a worship service or prayer meeting members would recite the creed of the order which is a development of the minimal beliefs and social principles presented in Chapter 5, Section C, sub-section 1, combined with the kernel of the original teachings of Jesus³¹

- We believe in the One God, Creator of all universes, Generator of life and evolution, Father of mankind, once manifested to us in Jesus Christ, and related to us by the Spirit.
- We believe that, as God and Jesus Christ love us, we must love and serve one another since we are all brothers and sisters, equal in dignity and worth in the sight of God.
- We believe in the teachings of Jesus and strive to live according to them and to spread them around us for the

³¹See above, pages 76-77.

glory of God, the salvation of mankind and its happiness in brotherly love on earth.

- Because happy souls can dwell only in healthy bodies we believe that no one can possess or enjoy what is superfluous or luxurious, according to the example of John Wesley, until all starvation and poverty have disappeared from this world.
- We believe that the earth and all its resources are the common property of mankind and that no individuals, institutions or nations have the right to monopolize, misuse, abuse or waste them.
- We believe that Christianity is supra-national; we work for final human unity and universal peace. To this end we approve all democratic attempts to give the world a united government.
- In the name of Jesus Christ we condemn injustice, oppression, exploitation of man, corruption, discrimination, segregation, violence and all other evils generated by the pride, ambition, greed, selfishness, perversion and cruelty of man.
- We believe in the Church of Jesus Christ as a redemptive community of believers who work in and for the world, as servants of God and mankind, in order to bring to everyone the message of divine grace, the promise of forgiveness and eternal life for those who confess their sins to God, sincerely repent, and acknowledge Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Amen.

CONCLUSION

There is nothing really new in all this, only the adaptation of old, proven principles and methods to the needs of our time. My suggestion boils down to a mobilization of the faithful in view of the re-Christianization of the Church. The proposed order would unite in a common and more structured religious frame her most devoted members in order to build a spearhead for true, comprehensive evangelism, with the support of the rest of the membership who, hopefully, would see themselves in the S.J.C. and even join them for a temporary contract to help Methodism realize all its potentialities.

Methodism has--or had--all the elements to be the church of the world. It might be that John Wesley did not see all the implications of "the world is my parish," and yet he ministered almost exclusively to the poor and the oppressed when, today, three-quarters of the population of the world are poor--even starving, and oppressed. What a parish! The prospective is really frightening, and yet, if we deserve the name of Christians what can we do but empty ourselves for the service of mankind.

In its tradition Methodism has all that the present world and the world of the future need:

- Love, compassion, willingness to serve the poor, the oppressed, the needy; willingness to go to them.
- A liberal, rational, simple theology which, however, does not allow for 'latitudinarianism.'
- An ecumenical spirit originated by John Wesley himself and developed by American Methodists.

In the United States alone there are more than 80,000,000 people who urgently need Christian service.¹ This is a tremendous potential for the growth of the Church, not only as an institution but, above all, as the Body of Christ.

And it seems that a favorable time for action has come. If membership is still decreasing confidence in religion is rising again. In their latest survey Louis Harris and Associates found the following responses which look very promising for the Church when compared to the previous figures given on page 37 of this dissertation. The question was: "How much confidence do you feel in the people who are running (READ LIST ABOVE) . . . a great deal, only some, or hardly any confidence?"²

<u>Feel a Great Deal of Confidence</u>	<u>1973</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1966</u>
			(See page 37)	
Medicine	57	48	61	72
Higher Education	44	33	27	61
Television News	41	17	N/A	25
Military	40	35	27	62
Religion	36	30	27	41
U. S. Supreme Court	33	28	23	51
Press	30	18	18	29
U. S. Senate	30	21	N/A	42
Major Companies	29	27	27	55
U. S. House of Representatives	29	21	N/A	42
Labor	20	15	N/A	22
Federal Executive Branch	19	27	23	41

In order to make these results more informative I have drawn on a chart the comparative curves of the variation of the indexes of

¹ See above, page 97.

² *The Harris Survey*, December 6, 1973, reproduced by permission of Louis Harris and Associates.

Confidence in the Federal Executive Branch, Confidence in Religion, United Methodism Membership for the period 1966-1973.

As the confidence in the Federal Government has reached an all-time low--three times less than trash collection services as illustrated by the following figures,³

<u>Great Deal of Confidence (1973)</u>	<u>Percentage of Public</u>
Local trash collection	52
Local police department	44
Local public schools	39
Local Government	28
State Government	24
White House	18

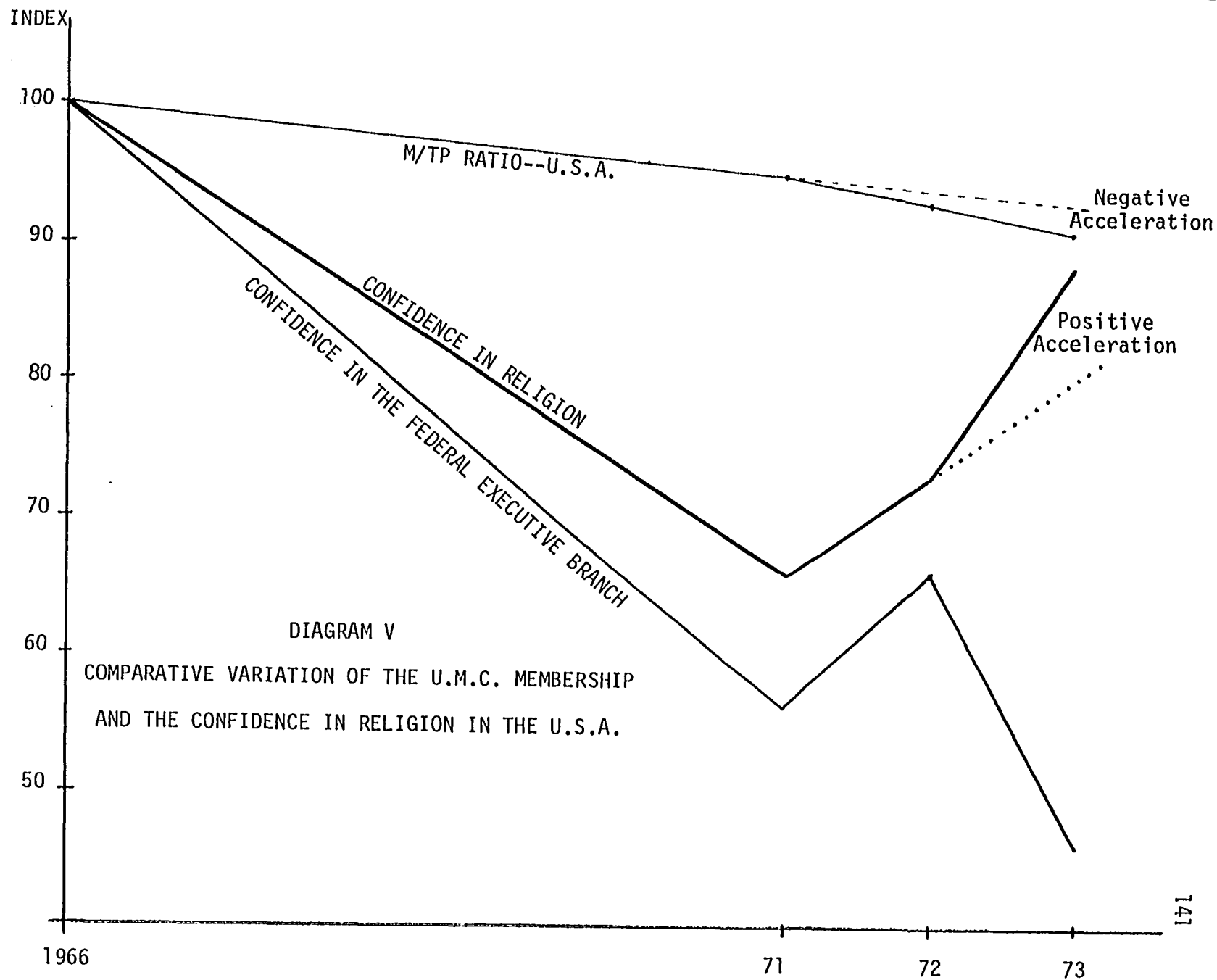
it seems that more people look again to religion with confidence. The change in trend happened in 1971-72 and seems now well established. Methodism however did not take advantage of this change and does not have the same turning point.

Here are the figures I used converted into indexes (index 100, year 1966):

	<u>1966</u>	<u>1971</u>	<u>1972</u>	<u>1973</u>
	% - Ind	% - Ind	% - Ind	% - Ind
Federal Executive Branch	41/100	23/56	27/66	19/46
Religion	41/100	27/66	30/73	36/88
M/TP Ratio, USA	5.45/100	5.19/95	5.05/93	4.9/91

The diagram shows that while the increase in confidence in religion has been gathering more impetus the Methodist decline has been worsening. This is a strong warning signal. My dearest hope is that the "people called Methodists" will take heed of it.

³*Ibid.*



For the church, as well as for any institution, to be satisfied and to be static is to regress. Growth requires a constant renewal.

The church itself is not immune to the general law of decline in which persons and groups lose the first freshness of the founder or great teacher. Let T. S. Eliot . . . state the issue:

*The Church must be forever building, for it is forever
decaying within and attacked from without;
For this is the law of life; and you must remember that
while there is a time of prosperity
The people will neglect the temple, and in time of
adversity they will decry it.*

The periodic cleansing and restoration of the Temple to its proper uses are the responsibility of those who have recovered for themselves the immediacy of spiritual experience and to whom the teachings of religion become translucent windows through which the light of heaven shines. The faith can really never be defended: it must be reborn in fresh hope.⁴

⁴John B. Magee, *Reality Prayer* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957), p. 2.

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